A Javelin of Fate

By

Jeanie Gould Lincoln

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by

Jeanie Gould Lincoln

Author of "Marjorie's Quest," "An Unwilling Maid," "A Pretty Tory," &c.

"He who will not when he may,
When he will, he shall have nay."
Old English proverb

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1905

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Published November 1905

TO N. O. T.

To her who shared my rapture and delight
When o'er my life its brightest sunshine fell;
To her who shares with me the lonely night,
And, sharing thus, her love the clouds dispel.

Washington, D. C.
August 5, 1905.

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A Javelin of Fate

Prologue

Chapter I

In the Virginia Mountains

"Ef yo' don' hurry a little, Uncle Cy, them hens won't never get inside the shed 'fo' the storm," said Aunt Polly, in the soft musical drawl which seemed to suit her ample chest as it ended with a faint chuckle that is indescribable. "'Pears like we was fittin' fo' a second Deluge, judgin' by the last fortnight's rains, an' thar ain't no possible way as I can study out fo' climbin' the mountain, even 'lowin' that the Ark an' ole Massa Noah was waitin' at the top to take yo' an' me 'mong the passengers."

"Hi! Shoo, shoo!" responded Uncle

Cyrus, obediently pursuing the three hens who were ducking in and out of the bushes at the back of the cabin. "Kin yo' 'tend to dat yaller rooster, Polly? He 's done hid hisself 'hind yo' bar'l ob rain-water, an' he 'll dodge roun' an' roun' unless yo' head him off mighty spry."

Aunt Polly's chuckle deepened into a laugh as she stepped cautiously outside the cabin door and produced from her pocket a few grains of corn which she threw invitingly in front of her. The hens, recognizing the familiar sound, responded by a wild and simultaneous rush in her direction, tumbling over each other in their eagerness, but the yellow rooster, having cautiously extended his beak and one claw in profile around the barrel, promptly retreated behind it with a defiant crow which completed Uncle Cy's discomfiture.

"'T ain't no use," grumbled he, as the second hen bounded into the friendly shelter of the shed with a final cluck; "dere 's nuffin' what 'll fotch dat rooster 'cept some pieces ob watermealyon rind. Did yo' clar 'em up after dinner, Polly?"

"Go 'long, Cy; d' yo' 'spose I did n't remember 'bout that? The rinds is standin' on the shelf 'longside the milkin' pail; jest yo' get 'em an' I 'll watch the rooster' till yo' come back. Be spry, now; land alive, that's a mighty black cloud settlin' on top Silver Mountain."

Silver Mountain, so called from an abandoned mine, partly prospected, from which its owners had been driven by lack of funds, was a spur of the Blue Ridge Mountains running down into the Shenandoah Valley, and there had been quite a little village of huts and cabins at its foot during the running days, which were abandoned when the

company failed. Times were better now, and a small but quite thriving town lay to the west of it. Upon the mountain road above there were few houses. The nearest neighbors that Uncle Cyrus and Aunt Polly laid claim to were five miles lower down, and consisted of half a dozen white families, old denizens of the mountains, a store, and a few negro cabins. Four years previous the pair had appeared on the mountain, selected their location, and, with the assistance of a few friendly negroes from the village, Uncle Cy had put up his cabin and bestowed within it what few belongings he had brought in the cart which carried them thither. Over at "the store" people said that Aunt Polly was a manumitted slave, and her superior air and manner, her more carefully spoken language, together with her straight black hair and olive-brown skin, seemed to give an air

of truth to the story. She was still comely, looking even younger than her forty years. Her capabilities as a nurse and skill in handling the sick made her in great demand among the mountaineers, especially with children, of whom she was unusually fond and tender.

The yellow rooster obstinately maintained his position, deaf to Aunt Polly's coaxing voice, aided by an inviting scrap of watermelon thrown artfully in the path to the shed, and the rain began to fall in great drops as the wind tore and rushed through the tall trees which rocked behind the cabin and down past the clearing at the turn of the road.

"I declare for it," called Aunt Polly, raising her voice, as Uncle Cy stood holding the door of the shed, "I've a mind to let that fool rooster jes' stay out for to punish him."

"Hi! dat 's a mighty big one," cried

Uncle Cy, as vivid lightning flashed through the heavy air, and a crash of thunder rolled down the mountain side. "Come 'long inside, Polly; I 'll ketch him now, suah."

"Hark! there 's some one coming down the road, Cy." Aunt Polly's quick ears caught an unusual sound, and the pair paused on the threshold of the cabin. "The good Lawd save us, what 's that?"

It was a voice — a woman's — raised in a shriek of such agony and terror that it rose even above the howling of the wind, and as it suddenly ceased there came in view around the bend of the mountain road a pair of maddened horses and a rough two-seated wagon. Standing in it, bareheaded, was the figure of a girl, and as the wagon swayed from side to side, she dropped the reins and poised herself as if for a leap.

"Don' do it, honey," shrieked Uncle

Cy, running toward the flying horses; but almost before the warning was spoken the crash came, and the team vanished around the upward path, leaving a senseless figure on the road at his feet, as the tempest burst overhead with a howling violence which, accustomed though he was to such storms, almost appalled Uncle Cy.

Standing inside the door, which she had prudently closed lest the cabin should be deluged with water, Aunt Polly waited for Uncle Cy's voice outside, and presently she heard him, panting from excitement and fatigue, at the threshold.

"Open, quick, Polly, fo' de lan's sake; she 's mighty light, but 'pears de wind 'ull drag her out of my arms ef yo' ain't spry."

Planting her portly person against the door to prevent too sudden opening for the wind (which might wrench it from

the hinges), Aunt Polly slowly retreated as Uncle Cy pushed cautiously inside, and staggered breathlessly toward the rather rickety calico-covered couch which adorned one side of the room.

"Pore chile; she looks like she was daid. Jest lay her down comfortable, an' help me fasten dis yer door, Cy. D' ye know whose team that was?" said Aunt Polly.

"Dere won' be no stoppin' dose horses till dey gets to de clarin', ef dey don' plunge off de precipice, Polly. 'Pears to me 't was Kiah Peaseley's wagon. I done tole him las' month ef he would buy dem colts dey is boun' to make him pay fo' his foolishness, but yo' can't argufy wif a man 'bout horses, never."

Aunt Polly apparently paid no heed to his reply, for her deft hands were busy with the fainting girl, who lay motionless on the rough bed where Cy had placed her; the long dark hair had

blown back from her face, which was more than usually beautiful, and the waxen pallor that overspread it began to alarm Aunt Polly, experienced nurse that she was.

"'T ain't no use keepin' her here, Cy," she said. "Jes' help me carry her into the oder bedroom, den you wring out hot cloths an' fotch 'em as fas' as you can. The kettle 's bilin' a'ready. Easy now, Cy. Pore little lady; she 's one of the quality — no mistakin' that."

Very gently and carefully the good souls lifted the unconscious girl from the couch and carried her into the room beyond, which was little more than a closet, but where Aunt Polly had bestowed an old-fashioned single bedstead which she regarded with much veneration, and never permitted Cy to use. The neighbors had often "wondered" why Aunt Polly indulged in the luxury of a spare room, but as any inquiry as

to it or its contents was always met with a certain air of dignified frigidity, which Aunt Polly could assume when she desired, their curiosity had never been satisfied, and was only commented upon when Aunt Polly was beyond hearing distance.

The storm raged on with unusual violence; the wind howled and shrieked around the lonely little cabin for hours, tearing down saplings and one great tree which stood behind it. Inside, the comely slave-woman fought her battle with Death, using every means in her power to alleviate pain and save life. And when, far on toward the dawn of another day, the wind stilled and a pale moon forced its feeble rays through the trees, a mournful little wail penetrated the cabin, telling that a soul was added to the world, as Aunt Polly laid carefully in Uncle Cy's arms a newborn child.

Chapter II

Marah

"It 's mighty mysterious," mused Aunt Polly over her washtub, as she stood outside the cabin door. "Three weeks ago this day the accident happened, and we ain't no wiser. 'Pears like Missy 's 'fraid to trust me, pore chile; I p'intedly led 'round the conversation, an' she shies like a sheared horse every time. Dare 's that baby, now — Comin'," she called out, wringing her hands free from soap, and starting for the cabin door. "Don' take her, Missy; I 'll feed her in a minute."

Apparently Aunt Polly's admonition was unheeded, for the baby was shouting lustily in its cradle as she entered, and the mother was sitting close by the window in an old armchair, her great

dark eyes fixed on the changing clouds drifting over the mountain peak, her hands clasped tightly in her lap. She did not even turn her head or take the trouble to reply. Aunt Polly took the warm milk off the stove, settled the crying baby in her soft, comfortable lap, and fed it deftly with a pewter spoon from the bowl which she stood on a chair beside her. The baby gurgled softly between spoonfuls; lacking a bottle, Aunt Polly had already taught it how to take its food, and the tiny creature cuddled its fists under its chin and presently slipped off into quiet slumber, Aunt Polly crooning a hymn softly as she watched its eyelids close. Then she rose, laid the child in the old cradle, and walked over where the mother sat, with eyes still looking vaguely up at the skies.

"Missy," she said respectfully, "why won' yo' trust me? Chile, I knows yo'

has had trouble; it's borne in upon my min' yo'se been hardly used. What can Cy an' me do for yo'? Don' yo' know I'd like to help yo'?"

The girl's eyes were turned slowly upon the kindly brown face.

"No one can help me," she said. There was not a trace of feeling in her low, trained voice; she answered, that was all.

Aunt Polly looked at the beautiful, tragic face for a moment, then she pulled up the one other chair the room possessed, and sat down beside her.

"Missy, I don' know how yo' come hyar, an' I don' ask. But the touch of them baby fingers has opened my heart, an' I 'm goin' to tell yo' part of my story, ef yo' 'll listen."

No response; the silent figure sat as before with eyes fixed on the mountain top. Aunt Polly sighed; then went quietly on with her story.

"I was raised a good way from hyar; 't ain't worth while to make Missy listen to all that. But when I was young I was pretty, an' I was peart an' full of my jokes, an' on the plantation I sutainly was petted an' spoiled. My Marster was mighty proud of me, an' I was brought up in the house, like my mother was before me. There was a reason, Missy, for that; I 've no call to be ashamed of it. That cradle, there, come from a house whose name is mighty well known in ole Virginny.

"I never quite knew how it all began, but when Marster married a fine madam from New Orleans, troubles seemed hoverin' 'roun' from the time she set foot on the plantation. I had lots of beaux, but I 'lowed I was mo' fond of Marster Nelson's Jim than the young fellers on our place, an' finally Marster said we should have a weddin' an' a dance for all of us to celebrate it.

Madam for the fust time took some notice of me, an' gave me a nice gown to wear, an' Marster fetched me a veil an' flowers, an' I sutainly was proud an' happy when Jim an' I stood up on the lawn an' was married by Brother Jenkins, the Methodist parson from the Four Corners. But, somehow, it seemed that Madam had supposed I was goin' to live over on Marster Nelson's plantation after we was married, but my Marster put his foot down, an' said he 'd no intention of havin' Polly go 'way; Jim could come over an' see me, an' we could have one of the cabins in the quarters, but he 'd never let Polly go, an' there was no use argufyin' 'bout it.

"After a year, Missy, my little girl baby was born, an' I was jus' as happy as the day was long. She was so peart, an' not so brown, even, as me; 'most the color of yo' baby, over there in my cradle. An' when she was nine months

ole the storm broke over my haid,— like the storm the other night, Missy, —an' it felled me to the ground."

The cabin was very quiet; only the sound of Aunt Polly's sobs, as she burst into tears. The girl turned from the window; there was something of human interest in her eyes at last, as she fixed them upon Aunt Polly.

"That chile was Jim's an' mine, Missy, but no earthly power could convince the Madam of it. She hated that pore little baby all the more because she had none of her own, an' she made Marster's life a hell for months. Finally he came down to my cabin an' tole me all; an' he said that Madam insisted that the chile should be taken 'way from me an' sold. Sold, Missy! my own little baby girl, — an' then he wept an' begged me to forgive him. I fainted dead away; an' when I came to I was in a ragin' fever, an' for weeks after pore Jim

nursed me day an' night, 'most crazy with grief, for while I laid there hoverin' between life an' death, they sold my baby, an' from that day to this I have never seen her, never held her in the arms that are longin' for her."

"And you — *cared?*"

Aunt Polly raised her head. The slow bitter words fell so softly on her ears that she doubted she had heard aright.

"Chile," she cried fiercely, as their meaning dawned upon her, "are yo' human? The beasts of the field love their young; don' yo' love yours?"

"No. I hate it." The slumberous eyes woke at last; such misery, rage, and despair dwelt in them that Aunt Polly fairly shuddered. Of what did those awful eyes remind her?

"Missy, Missy, go down on yo' knees an' ask the good Lawd to forgive yo' befo' worse happen to yo'."

"If there was a God such as you be-

lieve in I should not be here," said the girl coldly. "Well, what became of your child?"

Aunt Polly's lips quivered; her tender heart yearned over this poor young thing, half mad with the unutterable pain of her despair.

"She was sold 'way down South, Missy. Trouble came hard on me jus' then. Jim never was strong again after nursing me through the fever; he caught cold, an' went into a gallopin' consumption, an' died six months later. Then Marster's heart began to feel for me, an' he came to my cabin late one night an' gave me my freedom papers, an' tole me I had better slip away an' never let nobody know I had 'em unless some one tried to arrest me. An' I went, an' by an' by, Cy an' I foun' each other an' we was married, an' after while Cy went back to the ole plantation, an' Marster let him fetch the things what belonged

to me from my little cabin, an' at last we came up this yere mountain, an' hyar we expect to live till we die."

Aunt Polly paused to wipe away her tears. The girl laid her hand on her arm.

"Would you like to keep that baby?" she said, turning her eyes reluctantly upon the cradle.

"What yo' mean, Missy? Nurse her for yo'? How long?"

"For me? Yes," with a scornful smile that sat ill upon the young face. "I cannot say how long, but I will pay you well."

The baby stirred in its cradle; Uncle Cy's voice was heard from the clearing singing, "How firm a foun-da-tion ye saints of the L-ord," as he came toward the cabin. The girl rose hastily from her seat, and, going inside the little room, closed the door.

The moon came up late that night

over Silver Mountain, bathing the trees with its radiance, and making the rude cabin look picturesque and beautiful. Aunt Polly had crept out of bed to feed the baby, and sat dozing beside the cradle where she had laid the child, when she was startled into wakefulness by a soft footfall on the floor behind her.

"Do not wake Uncle Cy," whispered her strange guest. "Come outside the cabin and hear what I have to say to you."

Aunt Polly crept quietly behind, and the girl opened the door, going a few steps beyond, under the oak-tree in the clearing. She had tied a dark silk handkerchief over her hair; her long black dress looked too heavy for the slender, delicate frame, and her sombre eyes were full of the pathos which her words and tone belied.

"I am going to leave you," she said; "you saved my life, and although I

had far rather died, I am grateful for your care. Try to forget me; you will never know who I am; you can never trace me. A hard, strange fate has left me at your door; I am going out into the night; in the night I will remain."

"And the baby" — cried Aunt Polly. "Missy, yo'se more than welcome to stop; wait till yo'se stronger" —

"I am quite well, thank you," the girl replied coldly, repelling the sympathy so kindly offered; "keep the child — and — and — I suppose you must call it something" — Her voice broke suddenly with an accent of despair. "Call it Marah — that is a fitting name for it."

To Aunt Polly's ear the name came as a familiar sound.

"Mary! why, that was my baby's name!"

The stranger heard, but did not correct the blunder.

"Better so," she said under her breath; then aloud, "You are a good, kind soul; I told you I would give you money; here it is. In that purse is two hundred dollars"—

"Oh, Missy, I don' want all that money; 'pears like yo' don' trust Aunt Polly."

"I did not mean to hurt you." Her tone was more gentle, and Aunt Polly seized the opportunity.

"Chile," she said solemnly, all the poetry and deep feeling of her race coming to her lips, "does yo' know what yo'se doin'? Ef yo' desert yo' own little baby the Lawd will sutainly punish yo' where it hurts most. In the long years to come them baby fingers will draw an' draw, an' pull yo' heart strings till perhaps they 'll break with woe." As she spoke she laid a firm but gentle hand on the girl's arm, but the mere touch seemed to goad her

into sudden fury. She wrenched herself away with such violence that Aunt Polly staggered back against the oak-tree to keep from falling.

"Woman, who are you who *dare* to use such words to me! I do what I please, and neither God nor devil shall stop me;" and before the listener could recover herself to reply, the girl had vanished down the mountain side.

With a gasp of horror Aunt Polly gazed after the flying figure. She knew, now, where she had seen those eyes before.

Chapter I

At Conrad's Ferry

It was night on the Potomac River; not the clear starlit night of a more northern latitude, but with a slight mist in the air, and the soft soughing of a southerly wind which perhaps indicated rain. On the southern bank just beyond the bluff were a score of straggling houses, chiefly wooden shanties, with two or three negro cabins nearer the water, and at the edge, where the bank shelved down to the shore, was the ferryman's hut, and anchored just below it was his bateau, a rough, flat-bottomed boat, so-called from its resemblance to those of the Canadian frontiersmen, and

used to ferry horses as well as foot passengers.

The ferryman stood in the door of his hut looking out on the river. A shot in the distance had startled him, and he was trying to locate it as he peered into the night.

"Dar's trubble, suah as yo' born," he muttered, half aloud. "'Pears like somebody's comin' bofe ways. I sutainly heered a pistol, an' dar's a boat 'tween hyar an' de Point. Reckon I'd better light the lantern so dey'll know whar de landin' is."

"Let that lantern alone," said a low, determined voice, as a man rose suddenly from the ground behind him. "None of your confounded signals, or I'll bring the Union pickets down at once." The remark, being emphasized by a muzzle of a revolver displayed perilously near the negro's head, was instantly obeyed, and the ferryman replied

with alacrity: "Law, Marse, what fo' yo' talk dat a way to ole Mose?"

"Because I know you, you rascal, and have for years," was the reply, with a short laugh, as the stranger lowered his hand. "Here's something to assist your memory, which somehow seems less active than mine."

The ferryman's hand closed eagerly over the money thrust into it, and he bent forward to gaze at the face so near his own.

"Marse Peyton, fo' suah! How you get hyar, sah? I heard yo' was shut up in Richmond."

"So I was, Mose, and in several other tight places."

"Dey 'd hev to be mighty tight to keep yo' in," chuckled the negro. "'Member how yo' an' Miss Champe clumb into de ole tulip-tree from de room whar Madam locked yo' up when yo' was 'bout ten year ole? And yo' come down

to Cynthy's cabin whar I found yo' both when de whole fambly was runnin', an' shoutin', an' huntin' fo' yo'. I sutainly is glad to see yo'. Do yo' want me ter ferry yo' across?"

"Hush!" said the other softly. "There are two boats, Mose, or there will be very soon. One is coming down from Point of Rocks, the other is hugging this shore. Listen!"

The faint sound of a cautiously dipping oar directly under the bluff reached the keen ears in the doorway, and the two men went hastily down the narrow path at the foot of which lay the bateau. A small skiff glided alongside as a hail came from the centre of the river, — "Ferry, ahoy!"

"Light your lantern, Mose," said Peyton Randolph hurriedly, as he stepped on board the bateau and bent forward to lend a helping hand to the occupants of the skiff. One, an elderly

man, was rowing; the other, a slender, boyish figure with a short military cape drawn closely around him.

"Ferry, ahoy!" came the call again, this time sharply and sternly. Mose swung out his lantern.

"Dar's de patrol, Marse Peyton, coming back from Point of Rocks. Dunno who dese folks is — p'rhaps yo' do, sah."

"Have you the paper, Rod?" whispered Peyton to the boy, who jumped lightly aboard the bateau. "It's devilish unlucky you are an hour late."

"Could n't help it," muttered the lad; "the information only reached us late this afternoon. Take care of these cigarettes; they are rather scarce down below."

"Slip back into the skiff, Rod, and lie still under the shadow of the bluff until the patrol boat lands — no, wait where you are!" came the hasty coun-

termand. The other boat was now alongside, and Peyton went quietly forward to meet the party as they stepped off.

"Fo' de Lawd," chuckled Mose to himself as he saw the encounter was inevitable, "Marse Peyton jes' de same debbil he uster be, 'fraid o' nothin'."

"Who are you, sir?" said the officer as he discovered the figure moving towards him by the light of Mose's lantern. "And where do you come from?"

"Peyton Randolph of Baltimore, very much at your service, sir," returned the Southerner courteously. "I have been spending a few hours with my cousin, Captain Furness, by his invitation, and have my pass if you desire to see it."

"Furness, of the First Maryland Regiment," said the Union officer, raising his cap with equal politeness. "My

name is Phillipse, captain in the Third Regiment of Cavalry, regulars."

"Here is my pass," said Peyton, handing him the paper, and uttering a private thanksgiving that, so far, all was well. "I was just about crossing the river when your hail came" —

"Sthop that, ye young divil, — what 'll ye be afther" — A sound of scuffle behind them, and Peyton followed Captain Phillipse as he darted back on the bateau, where a big blue-coated sergeant was holding a slight form by the shoulder, as the boy struggled to escape from his burly hands.

"What 's the matter, O'Brien?" asked the captain sharply.

"The b'y, sor, was slippin' down the side ave the bateau when I see something glitterin' on the deck, and as I was steppin' to pick it up the youngster hit out wid his bit of a fist in me face, and grabbed the thing before me eyes."

"And what business had you with my property?" asked the boy angrily. "I had dropped my cigarette case. Return it to me instantly."

Peyton turned sick and cold. By what unlucky chance had he lost the package just intrusted to him. His hand went swiftly to his side pocket, —it was empty!

"Hand the cigarette case to me," ordered Phillipse. "Release the youngster, O'Brien. And who are you, sir?"

"My name is Rodney Mason." The boy shook himself free as O'Brien stepped back, and advanced toward his questioner.

"Where are you from, and what are you doing on the river?"

"I am from Rockville, Maryland. I came out to fish this afternoon on the river, as I frequently do. There is a small string of fish in the skiff, if you care to look for them."

"And how came you to be on this side of the river? This is hardly an hour for fishing."

"Of course not," with a laugh. "But the mist came up quickly, and caught us. I am only lying here until it lifts,—you see it's clearer now; I can see a few stars."

The boy's tone was so entirely frank and easy that Phillipse's dawning suspicion vanished. The little party had drawn nearer the lantern as they talked, and were now directly beneath it, and as Peyton's eyes fell upon the lad's face (from which his cap was pushed back) he turned pale with sudden alarm.

"Good God! It's not Rod!" was the thought that almost escaped him, and he bit his lip to suppress an exclamation.

"So this pretty trifle is yours," continued Captain Phillipse, turning the

case over in his hand. "Is this tiny cipher a death's head?"

"Yes," answered the boy with a short laugh.

"Rather an odd conceit, though a trifle gruesome. I 'll open it with your permission."

The boy watched him as his fingers sought the spring; then a rougish smile crossed his face as the box flew open and revealed four very innocent looking cigarettes.

"Mose, hold that lantern closer," said Phillipse, inspecting them carefully as they lay in his palm. "Will you smoke?" he asked suddenly, extending his hand. Without an instant's hesitation the boy took one.

"Will you supply the match?" asked he coolly. Captain Phillipse caught the boy's slender hand in his as he spoke, and took the cigarette from him.

"Select another," he said with a

searching glance which made Peyton shiver; "I wish to examine this." And he deftly unwound the paper, holding it up to the light as he did so.

"Such a pity to waste the tobacco," murmured the boy softly, with a malicious twinkle of his hazel eyes which did not escape his questioner. Jack Phillipse was conscious of a sudden subtle irritation. He longed to shake that boy with all his might. But he smiled calmly instead, thereby producing secret fury in the breast of his captive.

"There are three left; have patience for a moment." In exasperating silence the Union officer deliberately unrolled each one, and finally, after a thorough inspection, placed all the papers safely in his pocket, from whence he drew his cigar case.

"Let me make good the loss of the tobacco, and return your property,

— the case. Is that your boat alongside ?"

"Yes," said the boy, picking up his cape from the deck where it had fallen during his scuffle with O'Brien. "I don't smoke cigars, but let me make you a present of my fish and we will call it square."

"No, thanks, I won't deprive you of them." The Union officer bit his mustache to conceal a smile. Jack Phillipse's sense of humor had saved many a situation, and there really seemed no reason for detaining this very handsome, teasing specimen of boyhood. Though why the little rascal should look as pleased as if he had outwitted him Jack could not divine.

"You may go, youngster," he said kindly; "but take my advice and don't try fishing in these waters again, or you may find it dangerous to your personal liberty."

"Good-night, I'll not forget," answered the mocking voice as the boy stepped into the skiff, and the little boat swept out from the shore and vanished.

Phillipse watched the boat out of sight, and then turned back where Peyton stood waiting.

"Do you return by the ferry, Mr. Randolph? Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing, thanks. Tell Furness you saw me safely off. Good-night."

The rope creaked as old Mose swung the bateau round, moving slowly from the bank; and standing forward, gazing into the night, Peyton Randolph heaved a sigh of relief as he said to himself, —

"By Jove, that *was* a close shave! I wonder what dare-devil scrape Champe will contrive to fall into next."

Chapter II

Mrs. Vansittart's Ball

Two men walked briskly down Franklin Street and paused for a moment at the door of the Maryland Club. One of these, tall and slender, and with a somewhat military bearing, slipped on a bit of ice which had wedged itself between the bricks of the rather irregular pavement, and, but for a timely hand extended by his companion, would have fallen.

"Take care, Fitz, it's bad luck to return to your native land on your knees," said the older man laughing, as he helped him to rise.

"The soil of 'My Maryland' is welcome to my homage; I assure you I felt like hugging the paving stones, and the swish of the surface drainage of old

Baltimore was music to my ears when I rattled down from the train last night."

"You 've done yeoman service for the Cause across the water, my lad, and there are a few men inside the door who 'd like to tell you so. Your uncle can afford to wait a while; come in now, and know the joy of a rousing welcome."

"I can't refuse — especially with that crowd in the window," answered Fitzhugh Tilghman, springing up the steps, while Denbigh followed more slowly, and, entering the big, old-fashioned corner room of that most exclusive of clubs, encountered a hubbub of exclamations.

"Fitz Tilghman, safe and sound!"

"Hallo, old man, — where 's the meerschaum pipe you wagered me?"

"Fitz himself, — same as ever, only bigger and a trifle browner" —

"What a din," said Denbigh. "You'll addle the lad's head among you. He 's

not the only one who 's turned trumps. Fisher Lattimer came with him."

"Where is he now, Denbigh?" asked an elderly man, as the youngsters crowded around Fitz. "This town is n't a very safe place at present. Those cattle at McHenry keep plenty of spies, and you never know when you hit a secret service man."

"It will take rather a clever fellow to trace some of the counterplots," said Denbigh, dryly. "Our women are too infernally sharp, as a rule, to be detected. Queer old world this, anyhow. Let 's try a game of poker."

In the bay window Fitzhugh was demanding news with an insatiable appetite. Well born, well bred, he was a fine type of the dashing Southerner of his day, and, added to much personal good looks, he possessed a charm of manner that made him not only well beloved of women, but of men also.

Brave almost to rashness, he had only been restrained from joining the Confederate army because he was assured that he could be of more use to the Cause by executing secret missions abroad. From one of these he had but just returned, and after an absence of a year was heartily glad to find himself once more at home in that hot-bed of secession, time-honored Baltimore, where more plots and counterplots grew and flourished during the Civil War than in any city north of Mason and Dixon's line.

"You 're just in time for the opening of the gay season, Fitz," said Innes Pegram.

"Oh, yes, — the Vansittart ball," chorused the rest of the crowd in the window.

"Vansittart?" said Fitz; "don't know the name here."

"Vansittart? Biggest banking house

in Antwerp and Amsterdam," said Pegram.

"That's where I do know them," said Fitz, with a laugh. "Square with you fellows; I've a letter somewhere introducing me to the Madam from the junior member of the house, Van Der Boch."

"Have you, indeed," said Pegram, a trifle eagerly. "Then perhaps you'll be good enough to explain to us what brings them to Baltimore."

"Don't give me credit for too much knowledge. Some transactions with Van Der Boch took me to Amsterdam just before sailing for home, and he gave me the letter I spoke of, saying that the widow of Vansittart, the head of the firm, had recently gone to America to take up her residence in Baltimore. I know the Vansittart house and gardens, which cover a square, in Amsterdam, and upon my expressing surprise that the

lady should leave so fine a residence, was told that she is an American by birth, and wished to bring her young daughter out among her own people. What sort are they, Pegram? Has society opened its arms and formally taken them to its exclusive heart?"

"My mother is about to accomplish that feat. Mrs. Vansittart's mother was a Spanish Creole from New Orleans, and far away in the dark ages the families knew each other, so the Mater made out the lists for her ball, and to-night Miss Cecile Vansittart makes her bow to all of us, — you, I hope, included."

"Have n't presented my letter, — how the mischief can I have the audacity to intrude?"

"I 'll take you under my wing," said Pegram genially. "Reckon you 'll pass muster, Fitz. Come home and dine with me first."

"If I do Uncle Sid will scratch me

out of his good books. Thanks, Pegram, I'll meet you at any hour this evening that suits you, and like no fun better than a ball. Where 's Denbigh?"

"In the card-room," said Pegram; and with a good-by nod to the crowd Fitz made his way out of the club and started up Franklin Street.

Some two months before, the exclusive and dignified residents of Mt. Vernon Square had been roused to quite a flutter of excitement by the reopening of a large and handsome house which occupied one corner of the square. It belonged to the heirs of an estate, and had stood empty for some years because none of them felt quite equal to the expense of living in it, and naturally much interest centred in the new occupants. These proved to be a widow and her young daughter, who brought with them a retinue of servants, fine horses, beau-

tiful old furniture, and pictures, from, it was whispered, a very fine residence abroad. After due deliberation — for she made no move hastily — Mrs. Vansittart called upon Mrs. Pegram, and it was speedily noised abroad that the widow of the great Amsterdam banker had chosen to pitch her tents in Baltimore, and Baltimore — the social part of it — came with all Southern warmth and courtesy to make her welcome.

Mrs. Vansittart stood in front of her mirror, and gazed long and critically upon the picture it reflected. She was too well aware of her great beauty for vanity; her chief care, at the moment, being that her toilet should be beyond criticism. She might have posed as a Court Beauty by Velasquez, so Spanish her type, so royal the jewels that flashed on her neck and in her hair. Her husband, who was many years her senior,

had spent almost fabulous sums to fill her caskets, deeming himself fully rewarded by one of her rare, fascinating smiles. Somewhat above the ordinary stature of women, she carried herself with much grace and dignity, and the masterful dark eyes denoted her indomitable will and courage. Her face was one of great power, whether for good or evil depended largely upon her mood, and that, too, had its element of uncertainty. Her poise, mentally, might be above or below that of her surroundings, but the bystander would never be the wiser. And it was this atmosphere of mystery — of possibilities — which perhaps formed her greatest, certainly her most dangerous weapon. At her pleasure, no one could exceed her power of fascination, and when Evelyn Vansittart resolved upon conquest it was usually but an affair of time; she never failed to carry her point with utter dis-

regard of any obstacle that lay in the path of her desires.

Her eyes glanced approvingly from the jewels in her hair to the train of her velvet gown. A tap came on the door of her room and a playful voice said, —

"May I come in? Oh, mamma, I've caught you for once posing before a mirror."

"Saucy child, — of course I am 'posing,' if you choose to call it so. Remember that I have to conquer Baltimore — and these terribly stately neighbors," answered Mrs. Vansittart, with the soft tone in her voice that only her daughter had power to call forth. "Come in and be inspected, Cecile; I think Virfollet has done her best with your gown."

Out of a diaphanous mass of tulle somewhat modified from the exaggerated balloon-like style of the sixties, rose the girlish shoulders and flaxen head of a fairy-like creature. So fragile,

so ethereal, that a touch of pathos was added to the admiration which her lovely features and wistful violet eyes called forth. But, as if in direct contradiction to her physique, the joyousness of her disposition, her playful manner, and the exquisite kindliness that seemed to prompt her every thought won love and admiration for Cecile Vansittart from those with whom she came in contact. And to-night she was that charmingly unspoiled product of nature, — a very young girl on the eve of her first ball.

"Mamma, you are superb!" cried Cecile. "This new, strange Baltimore will be taken by storm when it sees my beautiful mother. I like your gown even better than the one I remember you wore at the Court ball before papa died."

"You must have seen it in your dreams," said Mrs. Vansittart lightly, gathering up her fan and gloves from

the toilet table. "You were not more than six years old, and what did you know of gowns?"

"But I do remember," insisted Cecile, following her mother from the room; "and I heard papa tell Vrouw Van Der Boch the sensation you made in the dance, and how the Russian Minister"—

"Hush, child,—my triumphs are past; yours to come. Do you hear the music?" The soft strains of a waltz came floating up the staircase, and Mrs. Vansittart followed Cecile's eager feet down to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Pegram and a few other guests had already arrived. The house filled rapidly; society kept earlier hours in those days, and by twelve o'clock the ball was at its height, with all the easy grace and enjoyment of a Southern city heightened by the pleasure of new surroundings. Baltimore social life at that period was a sea which required a skillful pilot,

for, outwardly gay, the waters were full of shoals and rocks for the unwary. Partisan feeling ran high, and one could never be certain when one would encounter the traitor or the loyalist. Indeed, it depended entirely upon one's point of view where to fit the appellation. The high-bred society woman who was sending "aid and comfort" to the enemy (perhaps carrying information in her innocent-looking work-bag) would be found dining with another, equally well known as a Union sympathizer, — each, perhaps, feeling that she would dearly love to do a bit of private detective work on behalf of whichever side she favored. This partisanship added greatly to the unrest and excitement of the day, and as there were on active service in both armies, Federal and Confederate, many of the proudest names in Maryland, the air was full of distrust and vague apprehension, no one

knowing when or where a bolt from the blue might fall.

The dancing had begun when Fitzhugh Tilghman ran hastily up the broad steps of the Vansittart house, and turned to touch the bell. A tall figure followed him, and as the door opened a voice behind him said, "Is this Mrs. Vansittart's?"

"Yes," answered Fitz courteously, stepping a little aside to permit the stranger to enter. As the light struck his eyes he saw the glitter of a gilded shoulder-strap, and with a surprised stare recognized the blue uniform.

"Have n't you made a mistake?" he asked, somewhat curtly. "This is a social affair."

"I am well aware of it," returned the other calmly. "I am here, as I presume you are, by Mrs. Vansittart's invitation."

"I beg your pardon," answered Fitz,

the gentlemanly instinct overcoming his surprise and irritation. "I had forgotten that this house might be considered foreign ground."

"And as such safe for belligerents," said Jack Phillipse, handing his cap and muffler to the waiting servant.

"That you, Fitz?" called Innes Pegram from the drawing-room door. "Why so late? Hurry, old man, I want to introduce you to a partner for the cotillion."

"Who the devil 's that?" asked Fitz, aside, as the officer passed inside the door. "What 's a Yankee doing in this assemblage?"

"Shut up," said Pegram good-naturedly. "He is one of the Federals stationed at Fort McHenry, and happens to be some kin to Mrs. Vansittart. Probably our hostess knows nothing of the politics of our social caldron, though I am pretty certain that my

mother would not have allowed his name to pass on her list. Come on, Fitz; Peyton Randolph is to lead the German with Miss Vansittart; I want to present you before it begins."

Cecile had left her post at her mother's side, and was dancing merrily. Mrs. Vansittart, with Colonel Denbigh in attendance, received Pegram and Fitz most graciously.

"You hardly need the letter you speak of, Mr. Tilghman, for Van Der Boch wrote me in regard to it, and moreover I heard of you often through the Tilghmans in London, who are old and valued friends. Ask Mr. Pegram to present you to Cecile— Ah, Jack, I began to fear you were not coming to my house-warming."

Jack Phillipse, bowing over the hand she extended, saw Fitz turn away, and Denbigh draw himself up with a stiff salute. Neither action was lost upon

Evelyn Vansittart, who, smiling serenely, faced the situation.

"Colonel Denbigh, you will let me present to you my cousin, Captain Phillipse. My house is neutral ground, where all my friends and acquaintances are welcome."

("And by Gad, sir," quoth the courtly old colonel, when relating the incident next day at the club, "when she looked me in the eye with that fascinating smile, and that air of *noblesse oblige*, damned if I did n't have to submit to her sovereign will and pleasure, and talk with the Yankee captain for an eternity of five minutes.")

"I fear you are a trifle late to find a partner for the cotillion," continued Mrs. Vansittart, after Denbigh had excused himself. "But there are several girls here who, I am told, are Union sympathizers, and who will be glad to meet you. Have I asked too much of

your good-nature in begging you to come to-night, Jack?"

"Certainly not. You don't know how impervious I am growing to the pointed avoidance of the Southern women. They look so maddeningly pretty, these Baltimore girls, when they trip across the street for fear of meeting a blue uniform. I met one the other day who had such a twinkle of mischief lurking in her hazel eyes that I wanted to doff my cap, and would have done so except that it would have been misunderstood and promptly resented. It will take all your Old World *finesse* and diplomacy to steer among the social rocks of Baltimore."

"But I shall succeed," was the calm reply, as she found the pretty girl she sought, and left Jack snugly ensconced beside her.

Among the most fiery of Southern sympathizers in Baltimore were the

Lovells, three very pretty, dashing girls, who were usually just getting into or emerging from some treasonable scrape which kept their friends in constant terror of a clash with the authorities. As yet, most of their escapades had such an element of dare-devil humor that they had been allowed to go scot-free, but the sight of a blue uniform was sure to inspire the trio with wrath and a desire for vengeance. The prettiest of the three sisters, Joan, a tiny creature (known familiarly as "the pocket edition"), no sooner spied Jack Phillipse on the floor of Mrs. Vansittart's ballroom than she set her pearly teeth as she waltzed past him with Innes Pegram, and bethought what she could do to annoy this obnoxious Yankee.

"What can our hostess be thinking of?" she murmured in Pegram's ear. "The idea of having that wretch — *here!* Why don't you take him by

the collar, and tell him he 's not wanted."

"Can't," said Pegram briefly. "Civilization demands courtesy in other people's houses."

He knew Joan well, and was always greatly amused with her violent hatreds, even while inwardly sympathizing with them.

"Courtesy be — sent to Hong Kong! I 'll make you a bet that I 'll manage to rid ourselves of that specimen of Uncle Sam within half an hour."

"Joan," — warningly, as he looked down at the wickedly dancing brown eyes, — "for heaven's sake don't disgrace us socially in the eyes of a newcomer."

Joan laughed, but would not promise, and Pegram said no more, knowing that argument would only tend to produce the effect he wished to avoid, but trusted that whatever plot she was meditating

would prove more mischievous than serious.

"The German," as the dance now called the cotillion was known in the sixties, was a polite game of romps, where all manner of figures were introduced, according to the fancy or whim of the leaders, some of which would now be called absolutely childish, but in those days only provoked fun and frolic. Joan Lovell, watching her opportunity cleverly, contrived to get near the leader of the band, who, sheltered behind a mass of tall plants, was turning over his music during a pause in the dancing. Hablemann, a big German who conducted the dance music for all fashionable Baltimore, had, luckily for Joan's scheme, been obliged to leave a subordinate to fill his place for the latter part of the evening. In her most coaxing voice Joan begged a favor of him. When the next figure came did he think

he could introduce the music of a song — when she waved her handkerchief — a song the dancers would all join in and sing?

"Vy, yes, of course," said the good-natured musician, blushing deeply at the honor of being addressed; "anyting dot de young lady vish." Whereupon Joan whispered a name, and then fled precipitously, nearly falling into Peyton Randolph's arms as she did so.

"Just looking for you," said he, as he whirled her off. "This is quite a new figure, and I'll explain it." The floor was vacant, but in the centre stood a chair, and after a turn or two he stopped beside it.

"Now, Miss Joan, you are to hold this small mirror; and Miss Vansittart will bring up, behind you, two men. You look in the mirror, and inspect first one, then the other; pass your handkerchief over the mirror which reflects the

face of the unlucky fellow you don't desire to select as partner, then hand the mirror to the one you wish to dance with."

"But what if I don't wish to dance with either?" cried Joan. "Can I go on until the right one comes?"

"Of course, but don't be too cruel."

Joan settled herself and her flounces comfortably in the chair, and with dancing, mischievous eyes felt that Fate was playing into her hands better than she could have expected. All round the room every one was watching the new figure. Cecile brought up two men, only to receive a coquettish negative flirt of the handkerchief over the mirror. Then, two more, equally undesired; but as Cecile turned back, laughing, to seek others for the capricious lady's choice, Fitz stood in her path, and she took his hand.

"Will you try, Mr. Tilghman? And

— I must have another. Captain Phillipse, please come with me."

Jack, who happened to be standing with his back to her, turned instantly, regardless of the glare with which Fitz honored him, and in a second the trio stood behind Joan's chair. She held up the mirror deliberately, stared at Jack's handsome reflection in it for a brief second, then wiping it out vigorously, she waved the scrap of lace in the air, and darted to her feet as the well-known strain burst forth from the orchestra, a song instantly taken up by every Southern sympathizer's voice in the room: —

"Hurrah, hurrah, for the Bonnie Blue Flag,
That bears the single star!"

Fitz put his arm quickly around Joan's waist, and she thrust the mirror into his hand, whispering, "Didn't I do it well?" in his ear as they danced down the floor.

The Union officer drew himself up

as if on parade, and stood motionless in the centre of the room, though his flashing eyes and heightened color told that the insult was keenly felt. Randolph made a hasty movement in his direction, but before he could reach him, Cecile, all unconscious of the cause, but feeling the antagonism in the air, had laid her hand on Jack's arm.

"This makes you my partner," she said sweetly. "I did not have time to explain the figure. Shall we take a turn?"

From her post in the doorway, where, with a mixture of wrath and amusement she had been witness to this extraordinary scene, Mrs. Vansittart said to Denbigh, at her elbow, —

"*Brava!* the child has saved the situation. I wonder who played the trick?"

Chapter III

The Man who Vanished

Cecile Vansittart slept late the morning after her ball, and her maid, Stéphanie, had twice tiptoed across the dressing-room before a very sleepy voice said softly, —

"Is that you, Stéphanie? I think I'll have my chocolate in bed unless mamma is waiting for me."

"Madame ordered the carriage and went out half an hour ago, Mam'selle; André has the chocolate at the door. I trust I did not spoil Mam'selle's beauty sleep?"

Cecile drew herself up daintily from her pillows as the maid brought in the breakfast tray, and proceeded to eat her rolls with unabated appetite, chat-

ting merrily with Stéphanie at the same time.

"You should have called me earlier, Stéphanie; I have n't an idea of the hour, but I promised to ride out to Dalkeith House this morning with Joan Lovell and Mr. Tilghman, and I am afraid I have missed my appointment."

"A message came for Mam'selle," said the maid. "I think André put the card on the tray."

"Oh, here it is," disappointedly. "They 've gone on without me. Never mind," more cheerfully. "Turn on my bath, Stéphanie, and send a message to the stable that I wish my horse at the door in half an hour. And I 'll have the new groom instead of Martin; he knows the country here, and Martin is apt to lose his way."

"The man of color?" — hesitated Stéphanie, uncertain whether to say negro, and with the politeness of her

race avoiding the more common epithet of "darky."

"Yes. Scip, I think they call him," said Cecile, laughing. "And fetch my green habit."

A proud and self-satisfied African was Scip as he stood at the door of the Vansittart mansion half an hour later. Those were the days of the "intelligent contraband," and the wave of circumstance had brought him from "down Souf" into his present position in Baltimore. Crossing the lines, Scip had first found employment with the quartermaster's men; then, one day, a volunteer captain had corralled him as a servant, and, in due course of time, brought him to Washington when ordered there on staff duty. Jack Phillipse had fallen heir to Scip when his first "marster" went to the front again, and he, in turn, finding that Mrs. Vansittart needed a groom to complete her household corps of ser-

vants, had secured the situation for him with the understanding that he was, in a way, responsible for his good behavior.

"Laws, Marse Captain," quoth Scip, with an indescribable air of drollery and confidence peculiar to his kind, "I 'se 'tended hosses since I waz knee-high to a grasshopper, an' I done tole yo' p'intedly dat I waz body servant to young Miss — No, Marse Captain, I *ain't* done tole yo' *what* young Miss, an' I don' mean ter; dat belongs to de life down Souf. But I 'll serve faithful wharever yo' put me, sah."

Scip's chief pride was Cecile's pretty blooded mare, but next to that the Vansittart livery appealed to him, for its claret color and white facings quite fulfilled his idea of elegance, and this was his first order to accompany his young mistress. He had groomed the mare's satin coat till it fairly shone, and he

stood holding both horses by the bridles as Cecile came smilingly down the steps of the house.

"Good-morning, Scip; do you think you can put me up?"

Scip's chuckle deepened into a display of all his ivories; Cecile put her foot in his hand and sprang lightly into the saddle. The mare danced a little, and Scip waited for orders before mounting.

"Which way, little Missy?" he asked respectfully.

"I shall have to ask you that, Scip. I have n't learned Baltimore streets very well as yet. I wish to go to Dalkeith House,— Mrs. Pegram's," directed Cecile.

"Dat 's out Relay way, Missy, — oh, yes, I know whar 't is, right well."

It took some little time to get through the streets, Cecile found, for the pavements were anything but regular, and

wet moreover and muddy. It was a relief when, following Scip's directions, they finally struck a dirt road and found themselves outside the city limits. Dalkeith, a fine old Maryland house, was on the post road of olden times; and the approach was somewhat winding after reaching the gates which stood hospitably open. Cecile rather expected to see Joan Lovell and her cavalier in the wide portico, but apparently no one was in view. Dismounting, she threw her reins to Scip and went quickly up the steps as he led the horses away. The house, large and wide, was a double one, with parlors on either side of a hall which ran through it from front to back, the door standing, Southern fashion, unlatched. Cecile pushed it open, and seeing no one within, turned to the right and entered the large square parlor. Back of that, with folding doors between, was the library, which at first

she thought was empty also. But as her eyes accustomed themselves to the light, she saw, seated by a window at the extreme end of the room, a man, who, with his head resting on his hand, appeared to be plunged in deep thought. She could see him perfectly; he was strikingly handsome, with a long, sweeping mustache worn cavalry fashion, which accorded well with his clear-cut features. Cecile hesitated; she did not like to advance, and was equally unwilling to retreat. Where was Mrs. Pegram, and why was the house so seemingly deserted? In her annoyance at the awkwardness of her position the riding crop which she held escaped from her fingers, and in falling hit the edge of a table, making a slight noise. Then a strange thing happened. From a figure of repose the stranger became instantly the incarnation of activity, for without pausing to look in her direction, he

placed one hand on the open window-sill beside him, and bounding lightly over it with the skill of a practiced athlete, vanished!

Cecile gave a little gasp, half fright, half amazement; then she turned and fled into the hall.

"Why, my dear child," said Mrs. Pegram, coming down the staircase as she spoke, "I did not know you were here. Have you been waiting long?"

"Only a moment," said Cecile, too bewildered to conceal her embarrassment. "I went into the parlor, and — oh, Mrs. Pegram — I am afraid I disturbed your guest."

A singular expression flashed across her hostess' fine face, then she said gently, with her usual composure: —

"My guest? I have none at present. Joan and Fitz Tilghman left some time ago. They thought you were not coming."

"But the gentleman, Mrs. Pegram, — certainly he was sitting in the window" —

"Which window?" Mrs. Pegram cut her short as she led the way into the parlor. "There is no one here, Cecile."

"He was there, I am sure, and he sat in that large chair," stammered Cecile, unable to reconcile a burglar theory which flashed through her brain with the face and beauty of the mysterious stranger.

"Then where is he?" asked Mrs. Pegram tranquilly. "What became of him?"

"Dear Mrs. Pegram, he jumped out of the window."

Mrs. Pegram's gaze of mild incredulity was beautiful to behold. She hesitated a second, then she laid her hand on Cecile's arm.

"Cecile," she said, looking the girl

directly in the eyes, "there was no one there. Do you understand me, my dear? *You saw no one!*"

For the second time in twenty-four hours Cecile's fine breeding rose to the emergency. The real truth never entered her puzzled little head, but she repeated naïvely, —

"I saw no one." Then, with a twinkle of her blue eyes which proved her possession of American humor, she added, with conviction, "It was a ghost; that is why I was frightened."

Mrs. Pegram longed to give way to laughter, but the situation was too serious. More than one life might hang in the balance of fate were her visitor discovered, and she dared give no confidences.

"As in England, many old Maryland houses have their family ghost, Cecile. Some day, if you would be interested to hear it, I may tell you of ours."

"And a secret chamber?" asked Cecile eagerly. "I saw one in an old mansion in Amsterdam which was said to have been used by the famous Beggars of the Sea. But yours would not be as old as that, would it?"

Again Mrs. Pegram experienced the sensation of skating over very thin ice.

"What a romantic child you are; your Old World simplicity is a contrast to our girls'."

"But your girls are delightful, dear Mrs. Pegram. Though"—she hesitated, coloring brightly.

"—Though they do take liberties," finished her hostess, glad to change the conversation. "I was greatly vexed with Joan Lovell's trick last night. It was a distinct liberty, and as such requires an apology. Joan told me that she wrote a note asking for forgiveness this morning."

"Which is granted," said Cecile

readily. Her mother had given her a hint after the ball that it was better to pass over the matter without discussion, especially — here Mrs. Vansittart grew emphatic — especially not with Mrs. Pegram. And Cecile was doing her best to obey the suggestion.

"Stay and have dinner with me," urged Mrs. Pegram, after half an hour had been given to chatting about the ball and its great social success. "I am old-fashioned enough to cling to my three-o'clock hour for the meal, and to-day Innes is coming out from Baltimore to dine with me."

"I should love to stop, but we are dining out to-night, and to-morrow you are coming to us. Will you order the horses for me; I really must start at once."

During Cecile's visit, Scip had been having an experience of his own which caused him great fright and much re-

flection. The drive, around which he led the horses, took two turns before arriving at the stable door, and the second one brought the back of the mansion in full view to the passer-by on the road. Scip, sauntering along, talking half aloud to his horses as he went, saw a tall figure vault quickly out of the library window to the ground, and then dart behind a thick box hedge which effectually concealed him from the house, but not from the negro's keen eyes, which fairly rolled in his head with excitement and surprise.

"Fo' de good Lawd's sake!" gasped Scip, promptly interposing the mare's body between himself and the box hedge, "Ef it ain't Marse Gineral! How'd he come hyar; to cotch me, I wonder? Reckon not, Marse Gineral. Yo' done get dis yere niggar no mo'. Spec I'd better git inside dat stable mighty spry." Scip fairly flew along

between the trotting horses, and did not draw a free breath until he found himself, panting and almost gray with fright, safe within the stable door. Once there, however, his wits returned to him, and he proceeded to ingratiate himself with the Pegram retainers, and by cautious questioning endeavored to obtain some information regarding the apparition of the fleeing guest. But old Cicero, the gray-haired coachman who had "b'longed to de fambly an' bin raised dar," was as astute in his way as Scip, and, moreover, had not much patience with any "contraband" or "Lincum sogers," so he listened with old-time politeness to all Scip had to say, and whenever a question was slipped in replied to it by asking another in such an artful and apparently innocent fashion that Scip recognized the ruse, and resolved to tell "Marse Captain" the whole story on the first opportunity.

The last flying fold of Cecile's riding habit had disappeared through the gates before Mrs. Pegram felt secure enough to return to her library. Once there, she walked to the window and looked carefully out; then, closing it, turned back to see the man she was watching for walk quickly forth from behind a large Japanese screen which adorned one corner of the room.

"Upon my word, Augusta," said he easily, "you do spring surprises on one! If I had known the intruder at my back was that very pretty girl I think I should have stopped and taken the chances, trusting to luck and your infinite fund of resource rather than give her such a fright."

"Do you mean to say that you actually came back and were behind that screen all the time she was here?"

"Certainly. I found I was in full view of the stable while behind the

box hedge, and I stole in through the side door and ensconced myself comfortably here. I knew you would not come further than the parlor, and the calm audacity with which you endeavored to convince your visitor that she had not seen my very substantial self merits my highest admiration."

Mrs. Pegram joined in the laugh as he sat down beside her.

"What was I to do?" she said ruefully. "I did n't dare tell her who you were, as I did Joan Lovell. The child has only recently come to the United States, and has very vague ideas as to the Civil War. Whatever she thinks,— and when she has time to reflect she very possibly may guess that you belong to the Confederate Cause,— I know she will not mention the incident because of the unwritten law — *noblesse oblige*."

"And then," he went on, "you asked

her to stay to dinner, and I had visions of another 'ghostly' exit."

"Nonsense; my invitation was merely *façon de parler.* I knew I was perfectly safe in giving it, and it seemed inhospitable not to do so. Stop teasing, and tell me your plans, and what I can do for the Cause."

His face changed instantly; the quick, alert look, the stern lines of his mouth told the man of action and set purpose.

"You cannot do much at present. Hampton is planning another raid; this time one even more daring than his last; and I take command in one direction, while he leads in the other. More than this I cannot tell you, but any news which you may obtain through social sources — news of movements that is authentic — helps us; that is, if anything *can* help a losing Cause!"

"For heaven's sake, don't say that!"

she cried. "Fitz Tilghman brings help and money from abroad; there are dissensions even now at the North; there is an organized move in Canada" —

"Of little avail," he said sadly.

"Do I live to hear you abandon the Cause?" she said in keen reproach.

"I? *Never!* You mistake me, Augusta. The last drop of my blood belongs to the South. But we leaders see the beginning of the end, and seeing it, struggle on. I have no right to discourage you; you know I am always rather a pessimist."

She looked at him compassionately, her fine eyes full of tears.

"I never knew what changed you so utterly in those days of long ago. I date it back to that dreadful trip to New Orleans from which you returned aged years."

He looked at her for a moment in silence. A dark flush mounted his

bronzed face, his eyes burned with an emotion she could not fathom.

"I would rather not lift the stone from that grave," he said with concentrated passion. "It holds all my youth, my faith, — indeed, my every hope. And it bears a woman's name."

"I guessed as much," she murmured softly; but, Gaspard" —

"Hush," he said, springing from his chair, "that is Cicero's whistle."

They listened a moment; again, under the window of the room, sounded the note of warning.

"I must to cover." He moved swiftly toward the door as he spoke, and she followed him. "Next time I 'll come by night, and send you word in advance. Tell Innes I meet two of our men tonight in Baltimore at the old place. Good-by; God bless you;" and, leaving a kiss on her upturned face, he was gone.

Chapter IV

A Daughter of Eve

"I DECLARE, Champe, it warms the cockles of my heart to see you devour that batter-bread. Your appetite convinces me that the stories of starvation parties down in Richmond have solid foundation."

"Solid?" quoth Champe Randolph, taking another half slice. "Did you say solid, Aunt Sue? Solid in foundation alone, then. 'Trifles, light as air,' — in fact, almost air itself is what we poor souls have been subsisting upon; yes, and it's getting worse every day."

Miss Susan Lindsay (affectionately known as "Aunt Sue" to all her large circle of friends and acquaintances) set down her coffee-cup and made onslaught upon the fried chicken with a

view to replenishing Champe's already well-filled breakfast plate.

"I am forced to remind you that I did n't leave there yesterday," remonstrated Champe; "and I 'm not qualifying for a Strasburg goose. Enough, enough, Aunt Sue."

With this assurance, Aunt Sue was fain to be satisfied, although she cast a lingering glance at the fat ham on the sideboard, and even suggested some spiced pickle which stood temptingly at hand. Then she settled herself comfortably in her chair and demanded the latest news from the beleaguered Southern city.

"It seems mighty dangerous to have you running the blockade, Champe. Do you ever reflect what those low-down Yankees would do to you if they catch you coming through the lines? I don't see how Peyton ever consents to let you take such risks."

"Can't help himself," said Champe lightly. "The dear boy knows he can trust me to take care of myself, though I do give him a fright occasionally." And she laughed at the recollection of the scene at Conrad's Ferry. "I do not expect to try it more than once again. And, oh, Aunt Sue, it 's the gay, wild drop of blood in my veins that comes straight down from my cavalier ancestor who fought with Prince Rupert and died for the King. I just can't help it"— And Champe, rising, playfully pulled Aunt Sue over to her favorite chair near the big bay-window and sat down on a low seat beside her.

They were dear friends, those two, and not only because of the near tie of kinship between them, for when Mrs. Randolph died she made Miss Lindsay joint guardian with her brother to her boy and girl. There was money galore for both children, but Aunt Sue

took Champe to her own home, where, except for two years passed in a Richmond boarding-school, she had spent most of her life. When the Civil War broke out Champe happened to be visiting in Richmond, where she remained for more than a year, and where her belleship made her, literally, the toast of the South. Returning to Baltimore, her beauty and wit gave her the prestige accorded to a favored few, and therefore it was little short of a marvel how she contrived to aid "the Cause" without detection. Perhaps some of her victims might have told, but so far their silence had been the pledge of their loyalty.

"Aunt Sue," said Champe, after they had asked and answered questions for half an hour, "I had one queer adventure not so long ago that I must tell you. Beside, there is a question in my mind whether" — She hesitated,

blushed, shook her head doubtfully, and went on: "I had started from Culpeper Court House with Percy Huger (Cousin Alice's youngest son, you know) to go for a short visit to Orlean, and took advantage of the escort of Carey Estes (of Longstreet's staff), who was carrying dispatches. We had to cross the Hazel River, and as we were looking for the ford, a man, dressed in a suit of butternut cloth, dashed out from the bushes on the river bank, and begged for a horse to enable him to cross. He had been wounded in the left arm, and somehow he appealed to me. He wanted to join General Early's command; and he told a straight enough story, but the difficulty was that our horses, which were none too well fed, were too spent to make the ford and return for him. So Percy rather curtly refused him our aid. The man looked so disappointed, so half-frozen and for-

lorn, that I offered to mount him behind me, as I had a big black horse which I knew was safe to carry double."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Aunt Sue. "Well, after all, you could n't well refuse a poor soldier — and a wounded one."

"Just what I thought," said Champe, with an odd little laugh, "especially as I was morally certain he never would know me again. Even you would have been puzzled to recognize me, for I wore an officer's gray hat, pulled down low over my brow, to keep off the snow which was falling in a light flurry, and my riding visor over my face completely covered every feature except my mouth and eyes. He had great difficulty in mounting, but at last with the trooper's aid we got him up and started. Just fancy the scene! The river was unusually swollen from recent storms, and partly filled with ice,

the snow was falling, and the cutting wind seemed to penetrate our very bones. The men went in advance of me, and the horses struck out gallantly; we were nearly across when the soldier almost lost his balance, but feeling him slip, I managed to grip his arm and pull him up until Percy's orderly came to my relief. But I can tell you, Aunt Sue, I was dreadfully frightened for a minute; I thought I 'd see him drown before my eyes."

"What became of him?" asked Miss Lindsay breathlessly.

"When we got to the top of the bank Percy dismounted and pulled him off, and as we were about to leave him I pointed out a little hut, not far away, where I knew he could find shelter, and I think I said he might tell the inmates that a lady from Richmond, a friend of Colonel Mosby's, sent him there for a night's lodging."

"That was fine," said Aunt Sue, with enthusiasm. "You saved a man's life."

"Yes," replied Champe, with rueful countenance; "but — I saved it — for the wrong side!"

"Bless my soul, child, what *do* you mean?"

"Now, that 's just the question, — and I 've never settled it. Aunt Sue, that man was a Yankee."

"A *what?*" Miss Lindsay could not believe her ears.

"A Union soldier, and even worse, I suspect, — an officer."

"Do you mean to tell me, Champe Randolph, that you knew he was an enemy and you deliberately let him go free, — the viper!"

Champe straightened herself, and the color flew to her face as she said hotly:

"Yes, I did. Aunt Sue, I could n't betray him. When the horse lost its footing, and he nearly fell off, he gave a

short exclamation, — well, I 'm not sure that it was a pious one, — and his accent was unmistakably — real, downright New York. Aunt Sue, look me in the face and tell me whether — viper or not — you would have then and there denounced him?"

"On consideration — no! I'd be ashamed of you if you had."

"There!" cried Champe triumphantly, as Aunt Sue rapped out this unexpected reply. "My conscientious scruples vanish."

"You need n't crow over it," said Aunt Sue, aware that she had fallen into the trap so mischievously laid for her. "But why do you imagine he was a Yankee officer?"

"First, because of his voice and manner; secondly, I 've run across him again."

"Not here, in Baltimore? Oh, my dearest child, do be careful. You will

certainly get caught in some of your mad scrapes."

"No, not here." Champe did not dare divulge where; Aunt Sue's proprieties would never forgive the boy's disguise which, so far, Champe had succeeded in keeping a profound secret. "I did tease him so — Good heavens! what has happened?"

Both women sprang to their feet as something crashed against the window-pane just behind Miss Lindsay's chair.

"It's only a snowball, rather better aimed than usual. I'll just warn those boys across the street," said Aunt Sue, throwing up the window as she spoke. Opposite the house were six or seven small boys, and one, a half-grown lad, evidently the culprit, stood gazing in their direction with his hands behind him. As Aunt Sue raised the sash, he let fly what looked to be another ball,

for it landed plump and fairly at Champe's feet.

"Don't scold them," whispered Champe in Miss Lindsay's ear as she pounced on the tiny packet and slipped it behind a convenient sofa pillow. "There's a policeman coming up the street, and I *don't* want that boy caught. It's Billy."

Whoever the lad was, or what his errand, the instant he beheld Champe's face at the window he took to his heels, and with the smaller boys flying after him like the tail of a kite, the entire party disappeared around the nearest corner. The fat policeman crossed the street and touched his hat to Miss Lindsay.

"Sure, it's thim limbs ave b'ys what's always gettin' in mischief, ma'am. If they cracked your window it's meself that'll lock 'em up."

"No damage done, thank you; they

gave me rather a fright as I was sitting close by. Don't lock them up, this time; they don't often get snow enough here to play ball."

"It's thrue for ye, ma'am. Good-day," and he passed up the street.

Champe, on the sofa safely out of sight, was unrolling the packet. It proved to be a small piece of paper, many times folded around a square bit of metal, the sort of thing used for weighing down riding habits or jackets. There were a few words written on the paper. Champe read them eagerly: —

"Estes court-martialed on account of failure of movement in November. Your evidence necessary for acquittal. Come at once by upper Potomac. Employ Dutch Hans."

Aunt Sue, having closed the window, was startled by a cry of anguish from Champe, who, deathly pale, was crumpling the paper with nervous fingers.

"It 's bad news," she said briefly. "I shall start back to-night if I can possibly manage it. Carey Estes has been court-martialed."

"What on earth have you to do with that? Oh, Champe, do not, I beg of you, run into danger again."

"But I must, Aunt Sue. Carey was with me — I have just told you we crossed the Hazel River together. The movement for which he carried orders failed, and he is court-martialed. It must be urgent or I would not be summoned. I must go at once and find whether the Lovells have any information. Don't worry, dear Aunt Sue. If Peyton appears during my absence ask him to wait for me here. I 'll not be long."

Jack Phillipse had been having a particularly busy time that morning in the adjutant-general's office, and started to

make his way back to Fort McHenry about noon. Walking down North Charles Street, where he had promised to meet a brother officer before taking the horse-cars which would carry him near the Fort, he saw a small crowd collected on the corner of St. Paul Street, and stopped a moment, preferring not to elbow his way through it as most of the spectators were women. Jack's experience had taught him that the sight of his blue uniform was a signal for avoidance on the part of many of the Southern women, and as he took up a position on the curbstone there was a little falling back of several of them; in fact, only three apparently held their ground in his immediate vicinity, and they were so engrossed in what they were looking at that they did not cast a glance in his direction. Up the street came a squad of men, and Jack saw that it was a provost-marshal's guard, surrounding eight

or ten prisoners, some of them in the war-worn Confederate gray uniform. As they neared him sufficiently for the faces of the prisoners to be seen, suddenly, from the crowd, rang out clearly a woman's voice, of startled surprise, —

"*Page Tucker!*"

Instantly there was a word of sharp command, the soldiers halted, and the sergeant in charge started to advance on the little crowd. Jack, who was aware that the cry had come from a girl who stood beside him, heard a low whisper, intended for his ear alone, —

"For God's sake, don't let them arrest me!"

"Then keep quiet," he said sternly, without even a glance in her direction. The squad had halted directly in front of the spot where Jack stood. The prisoners were eagerly surveying the faces nearest them, except one man, — a tall,

well-poised figure, — who stood twirling his eyeglasses rather carelessly as he fastened his coat collar.

"Who spoke there?" demanded the sergeant, pushing nearer the curbstone. No one answered, and one of the women laughed. Jack took a step forward.

"I think the call came from the centre, Sergeant Evans," he said. The sergeant turned and saluted.

"I did n't see you, sir," he said respectfully. "My orders are to arrest any person who endeavors to communicate with the prisoners."

"Was the name called that of one of the prisoners?"

"I don't know, sir. Shall I inquire?"

Jack looked at the man with the eyeglasses, who met his gaze with a cool stare of indifference. He opened his lips to order the sergeant to pass on, when a small boy rose from the curb where he had been crouching, and, point-

ing a dirty finger at the girl who had spoken, called out with the impishness of the street gamin, —

"That's her! I seen her when she hollered."

The little crowd had melted swiftly away during the colloquy between Jack and the sergeant, leaving only an elderly woman who had mounted the steps of a house in front of which they were standing, a man with a market basket on his arm, and the girl, whose eyes Jack now met for the first time.

"You young rascal, you saw nothing of the kind." Jack laid a strong hand on the imp's shoulder. "This young lady is here under my escort, sergeant. No further investigation is necessary. Move on!"

The sergeant wheeled and saluted, the squad swung into line, and the small boy, now thoroughly frightened, twisting himself free from Jack's angry grasp,

scuttled down the street and disappeared, leaving Jack and the girl facing each other. There was a second's pause as the provost-marshal's guard passed on its way; then Jack said in a careful undertone, —

"Will you pardon me for claiming an acquaintance? It was the only way out of an embarrassing situation."

"You may escort me as far as the next square," was the unexpected reply as Champe Randolph flashed an eloquent glance upon him. "I thank you more than I can say. An arrest at this moment would have been a great misfortune, and I should not have provoked it but for my surprise at seeing an old friend and playmate a prisoner when I thought him miles away in the South."

"I am very glad to have been of service," Jack answered, a little bewildered with her beauty and gracious manner, and at the same time haunted with an

idea that he had seen her before. "Pray think no more about it. It is a pleasure to have saved you annoyance."

"And I," said Champe, with a mischievous smile, as she paused in front of the house where she intended calling, "I rejoice in the courtesy accorded by a Union officer — to a rebel." And with a gay, teasing laugh she ran up the steps as Jack bared his head in farewell.

"Where on earth are you going, Phillipse?" called a familiar voice behind him as he continued down North Charles Street, and Ned Harris caught up with him. "I've been chasing you for two squares. Your orders have come."

"What are they?" demanded Jack.

"Report to General Averill for staff duty in the Shenandoah Valley. You've passed the corner where we were to meet, and my astonished eyes beheld

you with about the last woman I ever expected to see escorted by a United States officer."

"Indeed! And why so, may I ask?"

"Because she is the greatest belle and rankest rebel of all Baltimore, — Champe Randolph, — Peyton Randolph's only sister."

Chapter V

The Web of Circumstance

Evelyn Vansittart sat in her luxurious library alone, and before her, on her desk, lay an open letter. Twice had André, her footman, brought in a card upon a silver salver only to have his mistress dismiss him with a brief "not at home." It was rather a dull afternoon following a sunny morning, and Cecile had gone out on horseback with Fitz Tilghman, who had become her devoted cavalier, leaving her mother to what Mrs. Vansittart called "my European affairs." But it was not Amsterdam nor her vast interest there and elsewhere which had chained her thoughts. She was indulging in a retrospect which she seldom allowed herself, — she was alone with her past.

Taken abroad by her mother, after her father's death, at barely nineteen years of age, she met, while visiting at an historic English home, Guysbert Vansittart, a banker of Amsterdam. More than twice her age, a man of great fortune, much culture, and by no means ill-looking, he had (against all his preconceived ideas of what he considered admirable in a wife) fallen desperately in love with the beautiful American. The wooing had been short, and three months after their first meeting the wedding had taken place at St. George's with a pomp and brilliancy that gratified the soul of Evelyn's most ambitious mother. She in her turn married, shortly after, an Englishman of family, thus cutting off all connection with the land of their birth except such ties as were represented by their lawyer and man of affairs, whose office was merely to attend to their property in America.

Guysbert Vansittart came of good old Holland stock, and Evelyn took and held a position of much distinction in her new home. But to the day of his death, which occurred when Cecile was twelve years old, Vansittart carried the consciousness that he had never penetrated the depths of his wife's heart. He adored her; she was only kind. With the patience and phlegm of his race, the man endured his lot, consoled by the thought that if she could not return the passion with which she inspired him she at least bestowed it upon no one. And had he been content to die as he had lived in that belief, perhaps his passing would have been easier; for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is as bitter to-day as it was in the Garden of Eden. But just before he died, as Evelyn stood alone beside him, he opened his dimmed eyes and said softly, —

"Well-beloved, it comforts me to

know that thou hast never loved as I love thee. Assure me of that before we part."

A wave of temptation surged over Evelyn. Why not seal her long deceit with one little lie? But the inherent truth at the base of her warped nature asserted itself, and with lips that grew pale in the telling, she cried fiercely, —

"Man, you know not the meaning of the word love! I have loved — and lost — *all!*"

With a choking sob Guysbert Vansittart turned on his pillow and died.

During all the years that followed the tragedy of her youth, Evelyn displayed one singularly strong characteristic, — she never made a confidante. Her agony, her despair, was locked in her own breast; so was her desire for vengeance. Her secret, known but to one other, had, through a curious train of circumstances, been absolutely unsus-

pected, and for years she had been quietly planning her return to America. And now, in the letter that lay before her, came the announcement that the weapon was being fitted to her hand,— the only person who could help to avenge the past was, in answer to Evelyn's summons, hurrying to her side.

The fire burned low on the hearth, the gray shades of evening began to gather in the sky, but Evelyn sat on, unheeding, until the rattle of horses' hoofs on the pavement caused her to raise her head. She rose quickly, but before she had time to touch the bell, the library door opened, and André ushered in a tall, spare, elderly woman, wearing a long dark cloak and bonnet of ancient fashion.

"Tante Thérèse, at last, at last," said Evelyn, in a voice that, although low, told of repressed excitement.

"Mon enfant, mon cœur!" cried the

woman, showering kisses on the hand extended to her, and continuing in rapid French with the slight patois of a New Orleans Creole of the lower class, "After all these years — to see you again; oh, heart of my heart — and still so beautiful — so young!"

"My looks belie my feelings," said Evelyn sadly, as she undid the woman's cloak and led her to an easy-chair. "You make me feel a child again, Tante Thérèse. And are you well, quite well? I could wait no longer to see you, or I would not have demanded your coming in winter."

"But, what difference? I would have gone even across the ocean had you called me."

Evelyn drew her chair close to the other, and the conversation went on in low tones, but always in French, as the Creole's English was halting and difficult.

"Are you content with me, mon cœur? Has all been done as you wished in these years of absence? What service can I render now?"

"First, tell me of your journey. You came as I directed when I wrote you from Amsterdam, and reached Cincinnati safely?"

"Yes, yes; there were friends to the Cause in each stopping-place; but that dirty, smoky city, — bah! I hated it."

"And you still have our chain of communication kept open, Tante Thérèse? The information I was able to furnish by your last report was of incalculable value."

"I paid good gold for that, mon enfant. But the poor people, — ah, my heart aches sometimes for those who have lost all."

"I have no pity to spare," said Evelyn coldly. "The innocent always suffer with the guilty. But of one thing I

must make sure, Tante Thérèse; now, more than ever, it must not be suspected that I have any connection with the secret organization of which you are the nominal head. To make this secure, I have taken a small house on Linden Avenue which you will call your own, and where I can easily communicate with you by a system which I will explain. There are spies all around us, — spies who are Federals, spies who are Confederates, and our moves must be made with extraordinary caution. My servants, with one exception, I brought with me from Amsterdam, and I shall take you, myself, this evening, in my own carriage, to the house, where you will remain. Is Petit Jean already in the city?"

"He came ten days ago, and I have his address here in my reticule."

"He will live with you, of course, and he is safe. And now, Tante Thé-

rèse, tell me of yourself, and hold my hand in yours as you used to, long ago." For a brief instant her voice softened, but as the Creole poured out her story, she regained her usual proud serenity, and they sat there talking while the moments flew by, until the gathering darkness was upon them and André entered with the lamps.

"Order the carriage," said his mistress. "I am going out for an hour." Then, as he closed the door, she drew close to Thérèse and whispered in tones that faltered in spite of herself: "Tante Thérèse, tell me — of *him!*"

"Oh! La, la!" came the answer, in a venomous whisper that sounded like the hiss of a serpent. "M'sieu le General" —

"Not his name," interrupted Evelyn fiercely. "Do not speak it even when we are alone."

Thérèse nodded; her beadlike eyes glittered underneath their drooping lids.

"He is brave, that soldier," she muttered. "He fights, I am told, *comme le diable.* Those Yankees would give much to capture him, it is said. When Beast Butler came to New Orleans he disappeared. He is in Virginia now with the General Hampton. Oh, yes, he is cunning like the fox, and he escapes the traps we lay for him, always."

"He will not escape me!"

The Creole nodded again; then she said softly, —

"Mon cœur, we will work together. Do you think I forget? Do you think I forgive? I, who carried you in these arms that night when I found you at the foot of the mountain" —

"Tante Thérèse, how dare you?"

"Pardon," the voice said humbly. "I thought" —

"I forbid you! We deal only with the present. The future shall avenge the wrongs of the past."

Chapter VI

A Dangerous Hazard

"RIDE steadily, but not too fast through the streets of the town, and avoid any appearance of over-anxiety. Go down this street to your left until you pass a small country store standing by itself, with a barn on the same lot, but at a distance from it. Then go to the right, and follow the road, — it 's a pike road, and has an old toll-gate. Probably the keeper will not hear you, but if he does there is no harm done ; he has long since ceased to collect toll. Half a mile farther on you 'll find the Lawtons' house, — they will know best how to pass you through Charlestown."

The speaker, a small man, riding a big gray horse, extended his hand in a farewell grasp to Champe Randolph,

who mounted on a good-looking bay, sat listening to his directions.

"One moment," said she, detaining him. "What am I to do with this horse?"

"Leave him at the Lawtons', and I 'll send a boy after him to-morrow. Good-by, and good luck attend you."

Champe gathered up her reins, and started cautiously down the main street of the little town called Duffield's Depot. It was six o'clock, and a cold raw morning. In the dim light of dawn the houses looked gaunt and forlorn enough, but the hour was admirably chosen for Champe's purpose, as no one seemed astir except two men who emerged from a barn with a market wagon, and an old woman who was trotting along the path with a covered basket on her arm, from which a clucking sound indicated that she carried chickens. Champe passed through the town in

safety, and then put her horse to a canter along the pike road. It was some distance, she found, to the old toll-gate, but no one was stirring even there. The gate itself had been partially wrenched from its hinges, and stood leaning against the house. Champe looked up as she went through, and caught a glimpse of a woman's head as a hand pushed the thin calico curtain aside; but no sound followed, so she galloped on, and after another ten minutes saw the comfortable, old-fashioned house she was seeking appear in the growing light of the winter morning. In ordinary times Champe would have hesitated to make her first descent at that untimely hour upon a perfectly unknown family, no matter what their reputation for hospitality; but so sure was she of a welcome from sympathizers of the beloved Cause that she rode boldly up to the front door, and springing from her

horse's back, she passed the reins around a convenient pillar, and walking across the veranda, rapped smartly with her crop on the panel of the door. For some seconds there was no reply; then she heard a door open and shut inside, and presently a negro came running around the side of the house.

"Howdy, Missy," he said, with a respectful scrape of his foot. "Shall I take de hoss to de stable? Young Miss 'll be down shortly; yo'se mighty welcome. Please cum' 'roun' to de side do' an' I 'll let yo' in."

Champe thanked him, and turned to follow, when the door opened, and a sweet-looking girl on its threshold said, —

"Oh, *do* come in. We were expecting you, but not until later in the day." And she extended a friendly hand to her visitor.

"I am Champe Randolph," said the

newcomer, "and shall be most grateful for your aid and assistance."

"And I am Phœbe Lawton. I think mother has known you in Richmond, but whether she did or not, we are just as glad to do what we can for you. I got the message by 'underground' last night, only we did n't know which way you were coming, — up from Richmond, or out of Washington." As she talked the girl led the way through the hall and up the staircase to a big room full of old-fashioned furniture, and pulling up the window shades, smiled a welcome to her guest.

"I 'm sure you must be tired and hungry. The servants will have coffee ready in a very few minutes, and if you will lie down and rest I will send your breakfast at any hour you wish to your room."

"By no means," said Champe. "I 'll wash my face and hands, drink my

coffee, and join you when you take breakfast."

"Very well," said her hostess. "But you had better take my advice and try to rest a while," and with another smiling nod she closed the door.

Two hours after, Champe was eating a real Southern breakfast and enjoying it greatly as she chatted merrily with her hostess.

Mrs. Lawton, a kindly faced, delicate looking woman, whose husband and two sons were in the Confederate army, had shown so much kindness to the wounded and sick Union soldiers that she had been given a pass by the general commanding to come and go as she pleased from Charlestown, and although she was well known as a Southerner, no overt act had been laid at her door, and she had, so far, been spared visits from the provost-marshal at Duffield's. But Mrs. Lawton, while

she would give all aid in her power to those needing it in order to go through the lines, had conscientious scruples against using her pass except for the purpose for which it had been given, and therefore she was casting about for some device by which she could contrive to send Champe through Charlestown in a disguise clever enough to deceive the lynx-eyed Union officer who occupied the provost-marshal's office.

"How much time have you to spare?" she asked, after Champe had explained the necessity of haste on her errand.

"It is imperative that I start at once," replied Champe. "Colonel Mosby will reach Berry's Ferry within two days, and unless I can manage to meet him there I am sure to fall into the hands of the enemy, which would be fatal! If I can have military escort I shall be

able to cross the Blue Ridge as I have done before, and reach Orange Court House in safety."

"If that be the case we must push you forward. Phœbe, do you think we could manage to disguise Miss Randolph as a German market-woman?"

"Capitally, mother!" cried Phœbe.

"You see," explained Mrs. Lawton, "the principal traffic between here and Charlestown is in that form. You will have to obtain a permit to go in, and another to get out, and the only person who can procure them for you without exciting suspicion is Dutch Hans. He has done more for the Cause by passing Confederates through the lines than any one in this vicinity, and you can trust him implicitly."

"I was told to find him, and shall be delighted to make his acquaintance. What is to be done to transform me into a market-woman?"

"In the first place," said Mrs. Lawton, surveying Champe's slight, elegant figure with a smile, "you must take off that very stylish green habit, which we will hide under some bags of potatoes in the cart, as you will need to resume it on the other side of Charlestown. Then I shall have to stain your hands." Champe gave a little shudder. "It's not agreeable, but butternut juice is excellent and will come off. Come up to my room, where I have the necessary articles, and we 'll see what dress is needed."

" Well," said Champe, inspecting her hands after the staining process had been completed, " I have tried a good many experiments, but this is my first attempt with butternuts, and I call it a huge success."

" Yes," said Mrs. Lawton from the depths of her closet where she was hunting through her wardrobe, " I 've

great confidence in it. How will this skirt and jacket do, Phœbe?"

Champe beheld the faded old linsey-woolsey gown with dancing eyes. She was in her element now, and proceeded to gather its voluminous pleats around her shapely waist with but scant success.

"A needle and thread, dear Mrs. Lawton," she demanded, and sat down on the floor with Phœbe to help her. "I shall have to stuff that jacket; luckily for me it 's cold weather."

"Here 's an old felt hat, and a worsted muffler to tie over it. You must be careful to conceal your mouth and teeth, as I cannot stain them, unfortunately."

Champe laughed gleefully. Her exquisite mouth and even more perfect teeth were the envy of every woman who knew her, and Phœbe sighed, almost in despair as she looked at them.

"Don't let that muffler down for a

second; you've no idea how it would give you away."

"It's a capital disguise," said Mrs. Lawton. "Phœbe, run down and have Jake take the farm horses (the old pair, Captain Rollins might recognize the others) and hitch them to the covered cart. Then hide Miss Randolph's habit, riding hat, and fur cloak under the potato bags, and just add some turnips and winter cabbage for Hans; he'll be sure to have some one to give them to. And as soon as all is ready, call us, and we'll come down to the side door."

In due time the cart was brought round, and Jake, grinning and chuckling, helped the queer looking market-woman to clamber inside on the broad seat. Phœbe climbed on the step to give a few final directions to Champe.

"Remember, it's only about five miles to Hans' cabin. It's a little yellow house, back among the pine-trees,

and has a boot-and-shoe sign nailed to a tree out in front. You may very likely meet other market people, but you don't need to do more than nod to them in passing; they won't molest you. But *do* be careful of the Union picket guard; don't mistake the turn I told you of at the second milestone, and you need n't fear them after passing that point. Hans will see to the horses, and return them. Good-by, good-by! "

Both women stood waving her a God-speed as she rattled off in the springless cart, turned out of the gate and disappeared down the road.

The farm horses proved rather good nags at a pinch, and Champe passed the second milestone without adventure, and jogged contentedly on until she spied the little yellow house in the midst of a pine grove. The queer sign, with its shoe painted nearly the size of its boot, swung to and fro upon a tree

alongside the road; and as she drew up her horses, she saw in the window a pleasant, fat face which she was sure belonged to the Dutch shoemaker. He came slowly out of his door, down the little path, and eyed her rather suspiciously as she beckoned him to approach.

"Vots you vant mit me?" he asked, resting one hand on the wheel of the cart as he peered up into her eyes. "I has all dot market stuff vot I vants here in mine cellar."

Champe put up her hand and, loosening the disfiguring muffler as she spoke, said quietly, —

"But you will find room for these. They come from Mrs. Lawton's and the 'old plantation.'"

"Ach, 'beyond the lines,'" said the Dutchman, returning the countersign, while an amused smile crossed his face as he surveyed her. "And vot can

ole Hans do for you? Vere be you going to?"

"Back to Richmond," said Champe boldly. "And you must help me to get through Charlestown, and then from there to Berry's Ferry."

"I see, I see; an' you vants pass. But vere you go to sthop after Charlestown? You can't make journey in cold vedder so far to-day."

"I must trust to find some house for shelter," said Champe, as Hans climbed into the cart, and she rolled her muffler closely around her face. "Have you got the passes that are necessary?"

"I gets dem to de provost-marshal's office. Vere you tink? And, lady, you must not speak von vord, — you understand? Let me do all de talking."

As the houses and church spires of Charlestown could already be seen in the distance, it did not take them long, even with the jog-trot of the horses, to

reach there, and Hans drew up the cart before the door of the provost-marshal's, whose office was on the principal street. There were several soldiers in blue uniforms standing about, who plied Hans with questions when the corporal went inside to obtain the necessary papers for him, and they fingered the vegetables at the back of the cart, one of them pretending to steal a cabbage, which he tried to stuff under his coat. The good-natured Dutchman turned the laugh on him by throwing him another, and was so successful in engaging the attention of the guard that the men did not attempt to bandy jokes with his companion. After waiting fully half an hour, during which time Champe felt more nervous than she had ever done when she had only her own quick wit to rely upon, the coveted papers were handed them, and they were free to depart.

"Good luck, Dutchy," called one of

the men after them; "if yer don't sell all that stuff, we 'll relieve yer of the trouble of carrying it back." And his good-natured guffaw followed them down the street.

Hans took a somewhat circuitous route to reach the outskirts of the town, and Champe noticed that he seemed to be looking for some one. They finally stopped in front of a rather pretentious-looking white house, from which there came slowly forth a solemn-faced negro. At a sign from Hans, he filled his arms with the vegetables, and then said in a whisper, —

"Any orders for to-day?"

"Go to the cabin and meet us," said Hans. "And, Toby, I vants de sorrel horse. You un'stand?"

Toby nodded soberly and disappeared.

"Dot's all right," continued Hans, driving off. "And now, lady, de vay

is clear. Ve go to Toby's cabin, and dere you takes off dese tings, and can ride vere you vants to go. Here is your pass, — don't lose dot."

Just beyond the town, and standing by itself, was a decent-looking cabin, which Hans pointed out as their destination. Toby, he informed Champe, was a tobacco smuggler, and added that, if the lady wished, he could accompany her to Berry's Ferry as guide. Champe climbed out of the market cart at the cabin door with a sigh of relief. It had been a hard ride in a cart without springs, and she was glad enough to unpack her habit, cloak, and hat, and leave off her uncomfortable disguise. There proved to be quite a clean room inside the smuggler's cabin. When she came out she found Toby holding a horse with a lady's saddle on its back, and Hans preparing to start on his return home with the cart. He refused

all compensation, to Champe's surprise, and then told her she could leave the horse (a pretty sorrel mare) at Berry's Ferry with the ferryman, as Toby would be going there in a few days and would fetch it back to Charlestown. He held the stirrup for her as she mounted, and she shook the reins and rode rapidly away.

Notwithstanding the day was still raw and cold, and that Champe was beginning to realize she had breakfasted somewhat early, the exhilaration which she always felt when on horseback, and the spice of danger which was involved in her crossing the lines was enough to restore her somewhat jaded spirits, and she began to enjoy herself thoroughly as she rode on through the country, now sparsely inhabited. For months this had been the debatable ground of both armies; plantations held one week by the Federals would be raided the next

by Mosby, Hampton, or Stuart, and the luckless owners either despoiled by the one or content to give what they had left to the other.

Riding along at an easy canter, she came to where the road wound through a pine grove, and suddenly, as she neared the end of the trees, she heard the rattle of a gun, and a voice cried,—

"Halt!"

Champe drew up her horse instantly, and a picket guard filed out, surrounding her. She looked at them quickly; they appeared to be Germans, possibly belonging to Sigel's corps. Then she drew out her pass, and as she unfolded it, glancing casually at it for the first time, she saw, to her horror, that she was described thereon as a market-woman! Why had she been so foolhardy? How should she account for her green habit and the mare?

The corporal took the paper she coolly

handed him. There was an instant's pause, then, quick as a flash, Champe realized the situation. The man was holding the pass upside down; he could not read English!

"It is all right," said she, smiling down at him, though her heart did beat a trifle faster. "I had it from the provost-marshal at Charlestown two hours ago. You see it has the printed heading," and she touched the paper with her whip, devoutly praying that his comrades were as ignorant as he.

The corporal touched his cap; it was his first week of service in the Valley, and this beautiful, sweet-voiced girl appealed to his soft Teutonic heart. There could be nothing contraband about her.

"Dot's all right, lady," he said, releasing her rein as he spoke; and Champe dashed off, turning in her saddle to see him standing, cap in hand, watching her as she made good her escape.

Chapter VII

The Misadventures of a Night

"You sent for me, general?" Jack Phillipse pushed aside the curtain of the tent and saluted. The general sat at his camp table writing hurriedly, and a trooper, armed and ready for instant service, stood at his back.

"Sit down, Captain Phillipse," said the general, pushing a stool toward Jack, as he threw down his pen. "Sergeant, you will report to Captain Phillipse in half an hour with an escort of twenty men, ready for a night ride. You may go."

The trooper saluted, and left the tent as ordered. Jack sat waiting for instructions.

"Information received from Washington requires my sending out a scout-

ing party at once. The secret service men say that there is a house this side of the Blue Ridge which is used as a rendezvous for a particularly clever set of rebel spies. So far we have not been able to locate the plantation, but it is narrowed down to one of three in this vicinity. There is necessity for speed, as Mosby is known to have started from below, and is likely to be in communication with this very point." He pulled a map toward him and bent over it for a minute. "The plantation ought to be about here," — indicating the spot,— "almost in a direct line with Berry's Ferry. The house stands on a wooded rise of ground, and there is a ravine not far from it. It is somewhat difficult of access because of the pine woods, and you must use great caution in approaching it. Sergeant Finley has scouted here before, and I think you will find him useful. After to-mor-

row evening report to me at Winchester; until then the command remains here."

The day, which had been chilly, with a raw, cold wind blowing, had cleared by nightfall, and as Jack left the tent to get his horse and join the men assigned to the scouting party, the stars were out and there was a crispness in the air which bespoke better weather. Jack much preferred active service to his detail at Fort McHenry, and since rejoining the army in the Valley had been almost constantly in the saddle. And yet, as he walked briskly along, he was thinking of the Monumental City, seeing a pair of mischievous hazel eyes and a graceful figure that somehow haunted him with the tantalizing, elusive memory of past acquaintance.

Jack led his little command in a southeast direction for about an hour, then, coming to a fork in the road where two

roads met, the sergeant rode forward and, saluting, said, —

"Beg pardon, captain; if you turn to the right here I think we will strike the plantation you are searching for. It lies over the brow of that hill, and there's a ravine alongside of it."

"How much farther?" asked Jack, turning his horse in the direction indicated.

"Two miles, as the crow flies, sir; three by the road."

Proceeding cautiously along, Jack reached the top of the hill, and then, drawing rein, looked carefully about. The pine woods, dark and gloomy, confronted him on the east; the road skirted them as far as he could see in the clear starlit night.

"The path where we can enter is a stone's-throw from here, sir," said the sergeant. "It's some distance after we are inside the woods before you reach

the house. The road winds considerably."

"Can we make a détour and approach through the ravine, Finley?"

"Just as the captain pleases," said the trooper. "Shall I ride forward and reconnoitre?"

"Go slowly, and I'll follow you."

In this order the little troop moved silently on through the trees for perhaps a quarter of a mile, when they came suddenly upon an open space that had evidently been a lawn, beyond which stood a wide, low house with the usual broad veranda running around the front and one side. Jack dismounted noiselessly and threw his rein to Finley.

"Sergeant," he ordered, "hobble the horses in the ravine with a trooper to guard them. Place a cordon of men around the house, being careful that they are hidden from view by the trees. Allow no one to pass the lines going to

or from the house, and station a picket on the road to warn us of approach from that quarter. When this is done, meet me at the barn."

Jack gazed up at the house as he slipped quietly through the trees toward the barn. It looked deserted and melancholy, the wreck of what had been a fine old mansion. One of the pillars which adorned the front was badly battered, and part of the veranda railing had been torn off, and hung brokenly upon the ground. There was not a sign of life about the place save a faint gleam of light in an upper window. Jack crept cautiously to the barn, which stood a short distance from the house, partly hidden by the pines. The barn door was carefully latched, with a stick thrust through an iron staple. He pulled it out, and, dragging the door open, entered, leaving it ajar. As his eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness

inside, he saw there were several empty stalls, but a restless movement in one betrayed the presence of a horse. As he made his way slowly toward it, he stumbled, and, stooping down to push the obstruction aside, he ran his hand over what proved to be a lady's side-saddle. At that moment the horse, recognizing the presence of other horses in the vicinity, neighed shrilly. Jack sprang forward, and feeling his way into the stall caught the mare's nose and held it tightly, stroking the animal gently as he did so. For a moment he stood straining his ears for a sound, then, hearing nothing, slipped back and crept out of the barn. Standing in the shadow of the building, he heard a door open on the veranda; then a voice said, —

"Dey 's nuffin' de matter, honey. Dat 's jus' de mare in de barn. Reckon she 's kinder lonesome, dat 's all."

"I 'm afraid she 's loose in the stall," said a girl's voice in reply. "I 'll just step down to the barn and see if it 's all safe. Keep the door open till I return, Judith."

Jack darted around the corner of the barn, and nearly fell into Sergeant Finley's arms. Gripping him by the wrist, Jack muttered in his ear, —

"Don't molest the girl. I 'm going to enter the house in her absence. Remain on guard in sight of the windows. If I need you, I 'll manage to raise the shade in the room where you see that light. If I fire my revolver, rush the men inside at once."

The house door was now partly open, and by the light of a candle, which the old negro woman had placed on a table in the hall, Jack saw, as he drew nearer, that in its general plan the house was like most of plantation houses, with a hall running through from front to back.

The entrance to the barn could not be seen from the doorway, and that fact was evidently causing dismay to the waiting negro, for she walked across the veranda, talking to herself as she scrambled down the steps.

"I had n't oughter let Missy go dar 'lone. P'raps dey mought be a straggler hidin' in de barn. Nebber can tell whar dese Yanks is boun' to turn up."

Jack saw his opportunity and promptly took it. As the old woman tottered down the path he darted across the few feet of lawn between him and the house, and with an agile spring landed on the veranda where the broken rail hung down. In another second he was inside the hall. It was empty, and, as he calculated, the staircase was at the right, with a turn at the landing above.

Taking this in at a rapid glance, he was about to pursue his search when

a voice behind him said, clearly and coldly, —

"Who are you, sir, and what are you doing here?"

And then, two simultaneous exclamations — as they faced each other.

"Captain Phillipse!"

"Miss Randolph!"

The girl recovered herself first, and, with every nerve tingling with excitement, her spirits rose to meet what she feared was a desperate dilemma. But her gaze was steady, and her smile untroubled as she met his astonished eyes, and her most malicious imp of mischief prompted her to quote: —

"Oh, 'Come you in peace, or come you in war' — The latter, judging by the revolver in your belt. Surely, Aunt Judith and I are hardly foemen worthy of your — bullets?"

She took up the candle as she spoke, and motioned Jack to follow her inside

the parlor door. As he did so, the shapely figure in its green habit supplied the chord of memory which had, so far, eluded him, and springing to her side he said eagerly, —

"I know you now! You rescued me at Hazel River when I was half-dead with cold and hunger."

"Thereby 'affording aid and comfort to the enemy' — Well, and you repaid me the other day in Baltimore when you sent the provost-marshal's sergeant about his business."

"But I fear I took unfair advantage of your humanity. I found that butternut suit on a poor dead fellow who lay in the thicket, and you must have supposed you were helping one of your own soldiers, not a despised Yankee. Forgive the ruse, and let me thank you again with all my heart."

A brilliant blush dyed Champe's cheeks. Some new-born reticence for-

bade her to confess that she had penetrated his disguise. Besides, she hated Yankees; that this one was daring, dashing, and manly after her own standard did not make it necessary to — Heavens! she had forgotten who was upstairs. Pray kind fortune this colloquy had not been overheard.

"I think you have made the score even, Captain Phillipse. But what brings you here at dead of night? May I offer you some refreshments, or supply you with a map of the country in case you have lost your way?"

Then Jack remembered. "The rankest rebel of all Baltimore," — that was what Ned Harris called her. And in this house, supposed to be a rendezvous for traitors and spies. It was his turn to color hotly now.

"I cannot tell you how much I regret that my errand involves what I fear may cause you discomfort. I am ordered to

search this house and surrounding plantation for enemies to the Union supposed to be concealed here."

"Why not say rebels?" she said, with curling lip. "Do you mean that you will arrest me?"

"Not unless you give me cause," replied Jack gravely. "I must obey my orders, Miss Randolph."

"Then I will come with you," said Champe, seizing the candle.

Jack looked her in the face. There was wrath and defiance in her eyes, but not treachery; well, he would trust her so far.

"Lead the way," he said, bowing courteously as he stepped aside, and Champe noticed with a thrill of resentful admiration that he did not offer to draw his revolver. She flitted down the hall, but at the staircase he laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

"Upstairs first," he said firmly.

"There is a light in one of the upper windows which I wish to investigate."

"It is in my room," returned Champe haughtily. "But I believe the Union officers are no respecters of persons," and as she uttered the taunt she blew the candle out.

With a mad rush Jack reached the landing. He felt her soft form press against his arm as he flung himself forward to find the turn, where her knowledge of it gave her momentary advantage. At the head of the stairs he could see a faint thread of light under the sill of the door they were seeking. There was a sweep of her skirt, — a smothered exclamation as he caught her in his arms staggering against the door, which opened suddenly, and flung them headlong inside the room.

"Release that young lady, sir," said a cold voice.

Jack's hand closed on his revolver

as he struggled to his feet and wheeled sharply around. Seated at a desk in the centre of the room was a man in a gray uniform, holding a pistol in each hand, and both covering Jack. Well known in the Valley was that face and form; since the death of Jeb Stuart, this man was held the most daring and reckless of all the cavalry leaders of the South, save one.

"General Lafonte!"

"Well, sir," said the Confederate with cool irony, "you appear to know me. To what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"I demand your surrender," retorted Jack. "My troop surrounds the house. You are my prisoner."

There was a crash, a sudden flare of the lamp which the Confederate officer flung on the floor, then darkness, as Jack shouted, —

"Miss Randolph, for God's sake, don't

move!" and, aiming at the ceiling, fired his revolver.

No answer; but the rush of men across the lawn, and the tramp of feet in the hall.

"This way, sergeant!" shouted Jack. "There 's a candle somewhere at the foot of the staircase. Fetch me a light at once."

He could hear the old woman below scolding and imploring in the same breath, as he stumbled around the room thick with the fumes of the extinguished lamp. His hands trembled; where was Miss Randolph? Then in the darkness a low laugh floated on his eagerly listening ears, —

"Checkmate!"

It was hardly more than the softest whisper, but when the sergeant and his troopers rushed on the scene the light disclosed a young woman seated calmly in a big rickety armchair, and

Captain Phillipse leaning against the desk revolver in hand. His prisoner had disappeared.

Jack gave a quick glance around the room. There were two doors, one by which he had entered, and another which he wrenched open. It proved to be a closet, empty, except for a fur cloak which he recognized as having seen Champe wear on the Hazel River bank.

"Take two men and go through the rooms on this floor, sergeant. I'll search the attic. Are sentries still posted?"

"Yes, captain."

"No one has passed you coming up?"

"No, sir. I left a guard below. No one could escape that way."

"General Lafonte is concealed in the house, somewhere. Secure him without injury if possible. Let one of the men guard this door until I return."

"Beg pardon, captain," interposed Finley as Jack was rushing away. "There was signaling of some sort going on from the room above, — perhaps it is the attic. I saw a light flash twice, and one of the men reports seeing a mysterious gleam like a lantern from the north side at least a mile away."

"On a height, or lower down?"

"It appeared to be high up, sir; either in a tree or from a house."

"Very good, sergeant."

Jack followed the men to the door of the room, then turned back to where Champe sat regarding him with her tantalizing smile.

"Why do you do this thing?" he asked angrily, in a voice for her ear alone. "What right have you to risk your life as you did just now?"

"Because I love my cause," she retorted vehemently. "You would die to

save your flag, — why not I for mine? Go, search for General Lafonte; you will not find him."

It seemed, indeed, as if Champe was correct in her assertion, for, although Jack and his troopers went carefully into every hole and cranny of the old mansion, the Confederate seemed to have vanished. The sentries reported a second time that no one had passed the lines. The house seemed empty, except for a half-dozen negro servants varying in age from ten to sixty years. Only one room of the fifteen through which they went appeared to have been recently occupied, and that, the one where the sergeant had detected signal lights. The ashes of a wood fire on the hearth were still warm, and hidden hastily under a pile of blankets in the closet were tools used to tap telegraph wires. Evidently the information furnished by the secret service had been correct;

the mansion was used as a rendezvous for spies and conspirators.

Baffled by the singular escape of his important prisoner, Jack finally made his way back to the room where he had left Champe. The sentry stood motionless at the open door, saluting as his officer passed in and closed the door. Involuntarily, Jack smiled as his eyes fell on the figure in the armchair. With her head pillowed on the edge of the desk near which she sat was Champe, fast asleep, as untroubled as if in her own pretty room under Aunt Sue's hospitable roof in Baltimore.

Jack looked down at her for a minute in silence. Then he opened the closet door, and taking down her fur cloak, laid it gently across her lap. His men were eating a hasty meal reluctantly furnished them by Aunt Judith in the kitchen, and he had ordered the horses fed and watered before starting on their

way. He knew how weary Champe must be, for he surmised that she had been many hours in the saddle. Why disturb her at present? So he threw himself into a chair and watched her as she slept. How fair she was, — how captivating, — with her soft voice and gracious smile, and yet how daring and recklessly brave! Would any other woman sleep so tranquilly in a house full of the enemy's soldiers, herself in danger of arrest and a Northern prison? She was "the rankest rebel of all Baltimore." How the words haunted him! Even so, she had saved his life when in dire plight, and now evil fortune compelled him to arrest her. Stay, did it so compel? And as he reached this point in thought, Champe stirred in her chair, and awoke.

For a moment her hazel eyes were full of bewilderment; then she caught Jack's earnest gaze, and remembered.

"Did you find him?" she asked, with the roguishly defiant glance that Jack had been dreaming of.

"Why do you ask?" he said, looking down at her gravely. "There is some secret hiding place in the mansion I am convinced. I am also certain that you will not divulge it."

"Do you meditate razing it to the ground to find out, after true Yankee fashion?"

His eyes blazed; and, to her after amazement, Champe involuntarily faltered, —

"I beg your pardon; that was ungenerous," and rising, impulsively extended her hand.

Jack turned pale as he took it in his and held it firmly.

"What are you made of?" he said passionately. "A woman like you could conquer a world! Will you give me your word of honor to quit this wild

work, and let me send you on your way? I, of course, remain here — Good God! — the enemy!"

With a flying leap Jack and the sentry at the door cleared the stairs together. In the hall below blue and gray coated men were struggling for mastery, and shots fast and furious from outside told the story. Champe rushed to the window and threw it open. In the pale light of dawn she could distinguish the faces of the gray troopers, and she knew them well. They were the men she had come to meet, Mosby's command, and there, in hand-to-hand conflict with Jack, was the wiry form of the South's most famous guerrilla chief, — John Mosby.

Chapter VIII

Petit Jean Gossips

In a little house on Linden Avenue Thérèse Trudeau was busy in her kitchen. The amount of fuel necessary to heat her small stove had seemed a terrible waste to her frugal French mind, and she was using, instead, a brazier with a handful of coals, having secured that somewhat obsolete article at a junk shop. She was preparing dinner, and the *pot-au-feu* contained something savory, for the most appetizing odor arose from it as Thérèse drew out a table from the corner, and proceeded to lay the cloth, talking softly to herself, after the fashion of those who live much alone.

"Petit Jean is late. This is the third time in two days that I wait, for what

use to let the food spoil by taking it off the fire. Worse still, to cook it too long. I wonder what his absence signifies? I am, myself, disturbed. We hear nothing yet from that country below. Madame sent my last news to the Bureau in Washington, and by this M'sieu le General will be caught in the net of those who fish for him. Sacré! that I should have to work for these pigs of Yankees! But yes, it is all for her, mon cœur, my foster child; and to avenge her wrongs Thérèse will give her life. Ah, he comes at last!" and placing her cup and saucer carefully on the table, Thérèse went to the back door of the kitchen and unlatched it.

"Well arrived, lazy one," she said; "come, eat, or the dinner is spoiled."

Petit Jean was not a small boy, as his name would indicate, but a man of middle age, under size, but of rather sturdy build, with shrewd face and a

pair of keen, dark eyes. His eyebrows were bushy, and he wore a short beard, carefully trimmed. His corduroy suit was clean, but patched in several places, and on his head was a green peaked cap with ear-flaps pulled down and fastened under his chin.

"Tais-toi, Tante Thérèse," he said good-naturedly, removing his cap, and pulling up a chair, while she set the smoking food before him. "I have been hard at work as always. Listen, I will tell you while we eat."

Thérèse seated herself beside him, and, helping him liberally to the stew of rice and chili-peppers, fixed her beadlike eyes on his face as he continued: —

"I have been helping Pieter in Madame's stable this morning. There was much to do, as Mam'selle came back from an early ride before breakfast, and needed the horses again this afternoon.

And the new black man and I became quite friends while washing and rubbing down the beasts."

"Oh! the groom who rides with Mam'selle. Well?"

"Yes. Scip, they call him, also 'contraband' — of which, recollect, we had many in the days of Beast Butler, *là bas*, in New Orleans. And, behold, he comes from Baton Rouge and the old plantation we know of."

"Petit Jean, thou art sure he is not lying?"

"What cause for lies to me? No, Tante Thérèse, he is one of the Lafonte slaves. You see, he heard me talking with Pieter (and queer work do Pieter and I make of it, at times; he with his Dutch-French, and I with my French-English, but we understand each other, oh, yes), and he, the negro, is quick, and knows enough of our language to try and overhear what Pieter and I were

saying. He was in the stall next us, and once I heard him laugh, and, to confirm my suspicions, by and by I came and was friendly with him, and drew him into talk. He was afraid at first, but presently, when I spoke in praise of the Proclamation (which is to these negroes as if it were the sacred Bible), he began to speak more freely, and said he had come up from Louisiana with his master, a rebel officer, and then worked his way one night into the enemy's lines to the Army of the Potomac. He slipped once in his talk, and — what do you suppose, Tante Thérèse — he got out the name before he thought — Lafonte!"

"Thou didst not betray surprise?"

"Am I a child? No. But after much sympathy and parade of love for the brave Yankees on my part, the negro confided that he had seen his master not long ago — here."

"Here, in Baltimore, Petit Jean?

Where, then, are our spies that no report was brought to me? Who has dared to be false to our oath?"

"Doucement, chère tante; I have made a discovery. You know we have never been able to detect who the persons are in the city through whose aid many rebel officers steal across the lines into Maryland. We knew these were some high-up people, — grand folks, in short. Well, I have found one of these. I do not speak it well, but it is the house where Mam'selle rides so often with the young man who is always at her side."

"I know, I know, M'sieu Teelman" —

"Yes, that is the name. But the house, Tante Thérèse, — it is too hard for me. You will find out its name from Madame, perhaps. The General Lafonte was there; the negro says he saw him jump out of the window, and hide in the hedge, one day when Mam'selle was making a call."

"And did he, the negro, report it?"

"He was too frightened; he thought at first that perhaps his master had come to carry him back, but when his wits returned, and he remembered that blessed Proclamation, he decided he was in no danger, and, so far, has told no one. You can see, however, that we have friends in that house; it may be useful."

"More useful than you know," muttered the old Creole. "Petit Jean, you must take a message to Madame at once."

"I am ready," responded the man, pushing back his chair. "But we cannot reach her at this hour."

Tante Thérèse disappeared for a minute, and Petit Jean took that opportunity to wash his hands at the sink. As he was searching the dresser for a towel, she returned from the other room with a sheet of note paper in her hand. On it she had scrawled two small crosses

in red ink. This she put into an envelope which looked strangely out of place, for it bore a blue and gold monogram, and was addressed in beautiful, flowing handwriting (Mrs. Vansittart's own), and might, from its outward appearance, be an invitation to dinner.

"Give this to Stéphanie, Petit Jean. She has her directions how to deliver it. And do thou return to me quickly; I have other work for thee before nightfall."

Petit Jean took the note, placed it carefully inside his cap, as before, and obediently left the house.

During the month which followed his return to Baltimore, Fitzhugh Tilghman had made two discoveries which appeared to him of vital importance. The first was that Cecile Vansittart was a charming girl; the second, that he was madly in love with her. Many a love

affair, off and on, had had Fitz for its hero; but they were light and evanescent as the wind, and as he had always played the game fairly, he felt he had no burden on his conscience because of them. But now, "the light that never was, on sea or land" had thrown its glamour around him, and with all the ardor of his warm, impulsive nature the young Southerner determined to woo and win her.

The wooing had been after his own fashion. It amused Cecile at first to have flowers, music, invitations for cotillions, and riding parties planned in her honor, showered upon her; to see a pair of dark eyes looking wistfully into hers, to hear a musical voice soften when it spoke her name. With the shy reticence which her foreign education had fostered, she looked upon these attentions as simply good manners combined with a desire to make her feel

thoroughly at home in her new surroundings. But of late there had come a subtle change which Fitz was keen to notice. No more, perhaps, than a little blush at meeting, a lingering of her hand in his when parting, or a pretty excuse to keep him at her side, — only these, but enough for romance, enough for Love's young dream!

Cecile had promised to join a riding party given by the Lovells, but her favorite horse cast a shoe as Scip was bringing him to the door, so that, much to her disappointment, she had been obliged to dispatch the groom with her explanation and regrets. She stood on the steps with a decidedly mournful countenance as she watched Scip lead the horses away; but as she was about to turn into the house a dashing rider spurred around the corner of the square, and Fitz flung himself from the saddle at her door.

"We feared you were not coming," said he, giving his rein to a small darky who was lounging conveniently at hand near the curb. "Keep that horse there, boy, and don't pull too hard on the bit, d' ye hear?" Then, mounting the steps, — "I met Scip and the horses, and sent my excuses by him to Miss Joan. I wanted so much to see you. May I come in?"

Cecile wondered whether mamma would quite approve of a visit unchaperoned; but then Joan Lovell, and Rose Murray, and the other girls whom she knew, frequently received men alone. It was very pleasant, this American fashion, and perhaps she might dare, — this once. So, with a rather guilty throb of her heart, Cecile led the way to the drawing-room, thereby rushing upon her fate as André opened the door.

The drawing-room was a somewhat stately apartment, full of treasures in

the way of carved chairs, wonderful cabinets, and old tapestry. It would have been the delight of a connoisseur, but as Fitz followed Cecile he found himself devoutly wishing for a cosy nook, just large enough for two, instead of all this magnificence. He felt certain that she would establish her small person in one of those huge chairs where she would be nearly lost to sight, and expect him to sit decorously and solemnly opposite her in another. The humor of the surroundings in contrast to his purpose struck him, ardent lover that he was, and he bit his lip to conceal a smile as he said, boyishly, —

"Can't we sit in the library? I have n't my 'company manners' with me this afternoon, and nothing less suits this Old World atmosphere." And then he stood still, half-fearing he had been too audacious with this convent-bred maid.

Cecile, who was in advance of him, gave a gay little laugh.

"I thought you had lived long enough in the Old World to have absorbed it. The library, of course, if you prefer — Oh, Mr. Tilghman, please, please give me that!" — in a tone of abject entreaty, as Fitz stepped forward quickly and lifted from the polished wax floor, where she had dropped it, a man's riding gauntlet, which he instantly recognized as one of his own.

"You left it last week on the table," stammered Cecile, now a picture of confusion and pink blushes that stole down even to her pretty throat, "and I put it in my pocket, here," — touching the breast of her habit, — "and I must have just pulled it out with my handkerchief — Oh, Mr. Tilghman, what do you — what can you think of me?" and she lifted her artless eyes to his as she tried to seize the telltale glove.

"It's what you think of *me* that concerns me most," said Fitz, as he boldly took possession of both hand and gauntlet. "We won't mention 'Mr. Tilghman,' but you may say anything you choose to Fitz. Don't you know, you little darling, that I adore you, and I want you for my very own?"

And then it seemed to him as if a singular transformation took place; the walls of the room he had thought so forbidding stretched out and faded away, and he saw only the sweet, smiling face of the girl he loved as he and she entered their earthly Paradise.

Chapter IX

From the War Office

"And so my Cecile really wishes to leave me? What shall I say to this new, strange man who audaciously desires to carry her away?"

Mrs. Vansittart's usually tranquil voice had an undertone of emotion at variance with her playful words, and Cecile, quick to detect the change, threw her arms around her mother's neck.

"Have mercy on my laces," said the latter, smiling. "What would Vrouw Van Der Boch say to such a display of irregulated excitement?"

"Vrouw Van Der Boch is in Amsterdam, praised be heaven, and my dear, beautiful mother knows that the air of America has bewitched me."

"The air of America has much to answer for. Is that what you said to Fitz Tilghman?"

"I don't remember what I said," — Cecile blushed rosily. "Was it *very* dreadful that he spoke to me first?"

"Very; the proper Amsterdam fashion would have been quite different."

"I'm afraid we were both in the wrong," sighed Cecile penitently. "Fitz told me he *knew* he ought to be sitting on one of those big carved chairs asking you for the honor of my hand in marriage; but that sounds so stilted and awful, — much worse than in our own language."

"The air of America again, Cecile! If you cannot remember what you said to Fitz, perhaps you will tell me what Fitz said to you?"

"I — I — don't just know how it happened," said Cecile, shyness overtaking her, but so accustomed to obey

her mother's smallest request that she was nerving herself to repeat the little scene wherein the gauntlet figured. "It was all my fault, for the glove fell out on the floor — and I don't know in the least how it ever got there, I had hidden it so carefully — it was Fitz's glove, you know — and I was so dreadfully frightened — and" — She paused, breathless and confused, as her mother interrupted her with a laugh, — a laugh so full of genuine merriment and sympathetic feeling that it startled Cecile, whose wondering eyes recalled Mrs. Vansittart to the cold repression of her ordinary manner. For one brief instant a memory of her own girlhood had responded to the touch of Love, the Enchanter, only to die again as the tragedy of her life rose like a gaunt spectre before her.

"Never mind," she said gently. "It was hardly fair to ask, and I did not

mean to tease you. Keep those blushes for your lover."

"But you don't object,—you will not refuse him?" cried Cecile. "Indeed, indeed, I love him dearly."

Mrs. Vansittart surveyed her for a moment in silence. Then she said gravely,—

"Have I ever denied you anything? Be happy, dear, for life lies all at your feet. Send Fitz to me when he comes; I liked him from the first. If I had not, do you think I would have permitted him to wile your heart away?"

After Cecile left her, Mrs. Vansittart went to her desk and, opening a private drawer in it, took out a telegram, which she read carefully twice.

"Strange," she thought, as she smoothed the yellow paper; "it does not seem as if I *could* fail this time!"

She glanced at the silver clock on the mantel, then moved across the room

to touch the bell, but as she did so Stéphanie entered with a tray on which lay a card and an envelope with a blue and gold monogram. Mrs. Vansittart took up the card.

"Is the bearer below?" she asked.

"Yes, Madame; the gentleman was shown into the library."

"Very well; say I am coming down."

As Stéphanie left the room Mrs. Vansittart tore open the note. Her eyes lit as she saw the red crosses made by Thérèse.

"News — and of *him*," she thought breathlessly. Then she threw the paper in the grate fire and went downstairs.

In the library she found a quiet, sober-looking man in civilian's dress, but with an indefinable something in his appearance which suggested military training.

"Is this Mrs. Vansittart?" he asked, bowing politely, as she motioned him

to a chair. "I have brought an answer to your letter to the Secretary. We have to guard all news of movements in the Valley with more than ordinary caution just now, and it was deemed inexpedient to write a reply."

"I am much indebted to the Secretary," she replied. "I am naturally anxious to hear tidings of my kinsman, as it is now a week since a rumor of his capture reached me."

"Captain Phillipse, in pursuance of information received from trustworthy sources, had gone to the Peyton plantation, which, although deserted by its owner, we suppose to be a rendezvous for rebel spies. From a trooper of his squad, who managed to escape by the ravine near the house, and who reached our lines at Winchester, we learn that Captain Phillipse, after making prisoner General Lafonte and a young woman who was also in the house, was, with

his escort, surprised and taken prisoner by Colonel Mosby, the guerrilla, and is probably still in the hands of the enemy. The Secretary desired me to add that there will be an exchange of prisoners next month, and that he will make every effort to have Captain Phillipse's name upon the list so soon as we ascertain to what prison he has been consigned."

A question sprang to Evelyn Vansittart's lips, but she did not deem it prudent to ask it. Instead, she said, —

"Thank the Secretary for his very great kindness. I hope to do so in person soon. Are you, may I ask, a member of the secret service of which you spoke?"

"My name," said her visitor gravely, "is Bennett, and I am detailed from my regiment for special service in the War Department in cases where certain knowledge of military matters is imperative. My orders come directly from

headquarters, and I have nothing to do with the regular organized force you refer to. The Secretary asked me to mention this to you; he wished you to know that I am to be trusted."

Accustomed though he was to reading faces, the keen, penetrating gaze that this dainty woman of the world fixed upon him almost startled the soldier.

"I desire proof," she said barely above her breath.

"Is this sufficient?" he answered, throwing back the lapel of his coat and displaying a tiny Maltese cross in white enamel carefully hidden under it.

"The number?" she queried briefly.

"Seventeen."

Evelyn leaned back in her chair and smiled.

"The information in regard to the Peyton plantation and its possible inmates came through my agents," she said.

The soldier sprang to his feet.

"Then, madam, you are" —

"Hush!" she raised her white hand imperatively. "Such knowledge as you have just gained you will keep inviolate. Not even to the Secretary can you divulge it. General Lafonte appears to have escaped; do you know anything further of him?"

"Nothing, madam."

"When were you ordered to return to Washington?"

"By nightfall."

"Then there will be time for you to go to this address."

She wrote on a tablet the number of the Creole's house on Linden Avenue and gave it to him.

"Be there at three o'clock. Show your badge to the old French woman who will open the door. She will give you what information I desire to send to Washington. That is all. Good-morning."

Half an hour later the Vansittart carriage drew up in front of the little house occupied by Tante Thérèse, and Evelyn, followed by her footman carrying a hamper filled with nicely tied parcels, mounted the steps. It was generally known in the neighborhood that the old Creole was frequently the recipient of kindness and assistance from the lady who came to visit her, and these gifts were attributed to her visitor's philanthropy and benevolence. All of which proved an admirable cloak for the real motive of her benefactress, and prevented suspicion in case of prying or inquisitive persons.

In a few words Thérèse told the story which Petit Jean had related, pouring out maledictions on the heads of those who had permitted so important an occurrence to pass unsuspected.

"But it shall not happen again," she cried; "though I trust the fox was

caught in the old mansion where we heard he had taken refuge. Has Madame had news to-day?"

"The worst," said Evelyn bitterly. "He has again escaped. But sooner or later he will come across the lines and enter Baltimore."

"Why do you think so? Is there any other reason known to you for his coming than his desire to obtain aid and information for the Southern cause?"

"Listen, Tante Thérèse, and betray the confidence to no one. He will return, because the woman he comes to see at Dalkeith House is his sister."

Thérèse gave a gasp of dismay.

"But you, mon cœur, what danger, what peril! Surely you are mad to venture to remain in the city."

Evelyn shook her head with a cold smile.

"I am in no danger. She, Mrs. Pegram, is the eldest of the family; Gas-

pard, the youngest. She never saw me in the old days. When we were in New Orleans she was married and living here. There is nothing whatever in her mind which connects me with her brother. I took the chance of his silence. A coward will keep his own secrets. I went boldly to see her after my arrival here. She was necessary to me, and I preferred to be upon such terms that I could watch her without suspicion. My mother had visited her family at the Baton Rouge plantation, and it was all easy of accomplishment. Who would think of looking behind my record? My marriage, my brilliant life in Amsterdam and Paris, my large means, my cordial hospitality, — do you think my beauty and *finesse* cannot carry me through? Bah, Tante Thérèse; have you forgotten that what your foster-child wills she obtains?"

The pride, the arrogance of her air

and words carried conviction to the soul of her listener. Full well did Thérèse remember the indomitable will which had moulded even adverse fortune and used it for her own ends all these years. She seized Evelyn's hand and kissed it with passionate affection.

"Yes, heart of my heart, you have reason; but for one moment I was alarmed. Forgive me," she begged humbly.

There was a pause, during which Thérèse bustled about the room unpacking the hamper and carefully putting away its contents, part of which she carried into the kitchen. When she returned she found Evelyn bending over a small table on which she laid a sheet of paper.

"There will be a messenger here in half an hour to whom you will tell the story of General Lafonte's visit to Baltimore; suppress all that refers to any

connection with me. He will coöperate with you in regard to the espionage to be maintained over Dalkeith House. I have written the names and locality, with full directions, here, for him."

Thérèse took the paper, folding it carefully, and slipped it inside the reticule which hung at her side.

"How soon can you communicate with the Peyton plantation?"

"Oh, but that is easy; our 'underground' route is safe and sure."

Evelyn drew a letter from her bosom.

"Then this must go at once. Be certain that it falls into no other hands than his."

"If M'sieu le General be still in the Valley it will not fail to reach him quickly. If he be gone to Richmond it will be harder and longer."

"Do your utmost, Tante Thérèse;

but exercise great caution. Adieu for to-day."

She gathered her furs about her stately figure as she swept out to her carriage. The waiting horses champed at their bits and tossed their heads as they were driven rapidly away. But the woman sank back upon the cushioned seat with her hand on her heart, striving vainly to repress the agony which her memory of the past had awakened.

Chapter X

By Woman's Wit

"This is the best plan that suggests itself to me, Miss Randolph. It will hardly be possible to cross to-day, and the nearest and safest place to bivouac is the Thorntons' old house just below. I shall send the men and prisoners ahead, except my escort and Captain Phillipse, and meet them at Manassas Gap, where we cross the mountains day after to-morrow. You will find it better to wait with me at the Thorntons, as a long ride in this cold weather might be too much for your strength."

"Then I think I will return to the plantation for the night, and join you there to-morrow. Peyton is somewhere in the vicinity, and it is necessary for me to see him before going to Rich-

mond. He was to meet me last night, but failed to appear. In the mean time, before I leave you, Colonel Mosby," — Champe's roguish smile danced in her eyes, — "have I your permission to say good-by to my prisoner?"

They were standing on the bank of the Shenandoah River. Mosby, mounted on a splendid gray horse, wore the complete uniform of a Confederate colonel, surmounted by the inevitable gray slouched hat of the Southern soldier; Champe, in her green habit, was riding the sorrel mare. Before them lay the ford known as Berry's Ferry, and behind them sat the mounted troopers of Mosby's command. In the centre, carefully guarded, were the little squad of captured Federal soldiers, and beyond, between two armed men, rode Jack Phillipse. The river, partially frozen over, was impassable for the flat-bottomed bateaux anchored at the ford,

and as the ice was not sufficiently strong to allow the men and horses to cross on it, Mosby was compelled to change his plans to suit the emergency.

"Certainly, if you desire to. Take care, Miss Randolph, or your *beaux yeux* will do the poor fellow more harm than our bullets. I can picture how you were able to detain him until my arrival last night."

Privately, Champe did not think he could, remembering her very apropos nap; but she did not feel compelled to enlighten him as she rode back to where Jack was standing. As she reached his side, the horse ridden by the trooper on his left (bearing the familiar "U. S." on his flank) bolted suddenly, and his comrade seeing that the prisoner was sufficiently guarded by the surrounding troopers, turned to his assistance; therefore being out of earshot for the moment, Champe improved her opportunity.

"Listen carefully," she said softly, as Jack lifted his cap in salutation. "You stay to-night at a house near here. A veranda runs around it, and a large tree overhangs its roof. An agile man could reach the ground from the room above by its branches."

The trooper was nearing them again, and she spoke barely above her breath, leaning forward in her saddle as the mare swerved a little in quick obedience to her pressure on the rein.

"A death's-head cipher escaped you once, — this time be more vigilant! Corporal," to the trooper now alongside, "Captain Phillipse has dropped his cigarette case; pick it up."

And to Jack's unspeakable amazement she pointed with her whip to the ground, where a small object that he recognized instantly lay half-buried in the slush where she had skillfully thrown it.

"I 'm going to say good-by," she said, extending her hand frankly as Jack thrust the case into his nearest pocket. "I go back to the plantation to-night. Have you any message for Peyton?"

"My hearty thanks," said her bewildered victim, retaining enough presence of mind to clasp her hand eagerly in his, but quick to comprehend that her mention of her brother conveyed warning. Champe wheeled her horse and rode rapidly away, while Jack, prudently restraining his impulse to watch the graceful figure out of sight, obeyed the order to put his horse in motion, and continued up the road guarded as before.

As he rode along his thoughts were busy trying to solve a problem as old as Time itself, — the caprices of a woman. What did she mean, — this girl whose moods were as changeable as the wind, and who, disguised as a

boy, had braved him so successfully? He put his hand against the cigarette case hidden in his pocket, and smiled involuntarily as he recollected how cleverly she had tricked him at Conrad's Ferry, and his irritation at being baffled. What a dullard he had been not to recognize those dancing, mischievous eyes when she taunted him last night! What could be her reason for giving him the case, and what were its real contents? He had been carefully searched by Mosby's men upon his capture, and as there was nothing to arouse suspicion in the trooper who, obedient to Champe's command, had picked it up, he would be able to retain it until he had penetrated its secret.

The Thornton house, to which Mosby was making his way, proved to be a rather better preserved habitation than most of those left in the Valley. It was occupied by two elderly women, sisters,

and four servants, all that were left of many slaves. The old ladies had a terrible fright when the troop rode through their gates, imagining the intruders to be Yankees; but being reassured by the slouched hats and gray uniforms, they came timidly out on the veranda and gave Mosby a most cordial and delighted welcome.

The guerrilla chief proved a more kindly captor than Jack had expected. After carefully investigating the small room upstairs, where he proposed to confine his prisoner, to see that the windows were nailed up, and the lock of the door secure, he gave Jack a cordial invitation to come down to supper, which the old ladies were endeavoring to prepare for their unexpected guests. Fortunately, having captured a quantity of supplies from a Federal train during his Northern raid, Mosby had a packhorse with his escort, which proved a

veritable godsend to the sisters, for, with many distressed apologies, all they were able to set before them was a dish of hominy and a pitcher of milk. Their joy when a trooper brought in a bag of coffee, a sack of flour, hams, sugar, and a paper of tea, was a revelation to Jack, and he felt a throb of sympathy as he realized what war — grim war — had been to these and many another Southern woman.

With the curious *bonhomie* that characterizes most soldiers when not in actual conflict, the Confederate and Federal officers ate their supper together, Mosby proving himself a most agreeable companion, finally producing half a dozen fine cigars, which he laid on the table with a twinkle of his deep gray eyes.

"Your commissaries know what good tobacco is," he said, lighting one, and he heaved a contented sigh as the

fragrant smoke curled up overhead. "I return my compliments and thanks to General Torbert, whose train I captured, being quite sure that I appreciate my spoils much more than he will his losses."

At last, as the early twilight was deepening into night, Jack was escorted upstairs and locked carefully into his room, which was supplied with a candle and a small fire. Mosby, who accompanied him to assure himself again that all was safe, gave a short laugh as he saw Jack's eye go quickly to the chimney.

"No chance for you there, captain, it's too narrow. You're safe till to-morrow, and I shall leave a sentry at the door; good-night."

Jack heard the key click in the lock, and then, in his turn, began to scrutinize his surroundings. Candle in hand, he inspected the two windows. From the

outside he had seen that they opened on the roof of the veranda, as Champe had said, but, granting that he had the necessary tools, he could not extract the nails which had been put there without a noise which the sentry would be sure to hear. He threw himself into a chair with an impatient sigh. Even yet he did not dare to open the cigarette case lest Mosby should make his appearance suddenly, notwithstanding the precautions he had already taken to make his prisoner's escape impossible. Jack took out his watch, laid it on the table, and sat there, deliberately watching the hands tick on for full twenty minutes. Then, with ears strained to catch every sound, he pulled out the cigarette case.

It was a pretty trifle, as he had called it when seen by the light of old Mose's lantern at Conrad's Ferry, and as he searched eagerly for the hidden spring

he wondered what it had concealed then. What was it she said? "The cipher escaped you once." By Jove! that *was* it, of course. The case had evidently been filled again, for the first spring, which he found easily, opened, and there were four cigarettes, as innocent-looking as those he had destroyed. He pressed his fingers on the diamond-studded death's-head; it remained intact. Perhaps it had some connection with the other spring. No, that failed also. As he again placed his fingers on it he moved his hand gently to the right; the skeleton head turned halfway round, the crossbones sprang up; and lo, a false bottom lay open before him. In it was a tiny file of highly tempered steel, a coil of wire, and a scrap of paper tightly folded. Jack hastily hid the file and wire inside his coat, inspected carefully the curious mechanism of the death's-head, swung it

back into place, and unrolled the paper, which contained several penciled lines without signature.

"If you escape on this side of the Blue Ridge, follow the ravine back to the plantation. Judith has instructions. Password, 'Conrad's Ferry.'"

Jack sprang to his feet in almost uncontrollable excitement. She had planned this before they left the plantation. Fate had played into her hands by making the crossing at Berry's Ferry impassable, and now she had gone back. By heavens! he would get there and see her once again if he had to run the gauntlet of all Mosby's command with only his own unaided fists. He could see her smile, her lovely mouth, and the exquisite turn of her throat as she had lain there asleep, trusting to his honor as a gentleman to protect her. God bless her! thumped Jack's heart; and then he pulled himself together, pressed

the paper to his lips, and, holding it over the candle, watched it burn, and threw the ashes carefully on the fire.

An hour passed; two hours. Jack sat by the table thinking. It was now ten o'clock, and the house was apparently quiet, its inmates asleep. Again he examined the windows, but the panes were small, and the outside blinds wooden. As he stood before them, almost in despair, he was conscious of a strange pungent smell which penetrated his nostrils. It was smoke; either the house or some of the outhouses were on fire!

Jack took out the wire Champe had given him and walked softly to the door of the room. Very gently he inserted the end of it in the keyhole by aid of the file and found that he could turn the lock. Slowly, surely, the wire was accomplishing the work; he paused and listened. Not a sound; had

the sentry been withdrawn, — perhaps not placed there? The smoke was now increasing perceptibly; evidently the barn was on fire, for he could see a glare from the outside, and then, as the lock finally yielded to his hand, there sounded on the still night the long-drawn shriek of a frightened horse.

Jack heard the rush of footsteps in the hall and on the stairs, and creeping softly outside, closed the door behind him, then tiptoed through another door which he saw open at his left. Once inside he stood perfectly still. There was a very faint light from a smouldering log on the hearth, and by it he saw a big, old-fashioned, four-posted bedstead in the centre of the room. Evidently the occupant had just left it, for the bed was empty and the bed-clothes were thrown back. It was the work of a minute for Jack to close the door, shoot the bolt, and rush across to the window.

He raised it, threw his leg cautiously over the sill, and drew himself carefully out on the veranda roof. Then, mindful of the faint light behind him, he deliberately shut the window, pushed to the wooden blind lest he should be seen from below, and crawled cautiously down the sloping roof to reach the branches of the friendly tree which overhung it so thickly that even then they afforded some shelter. A few steps brought him to the end of the roof, and as he poised himself with his legs over the edge he heard a voice below him say, —

"Hold the nag for a minute, Frank; I've got to rush back and see if the colonel's gray is safe. Old Martin is in a blue funk; it was his pipe that did the mischief."

Jack peered over the roof. By the light of the fire he could see that the horse held by the trooper was one of those belonging to his men, and he knew

that it was fresh. With an agile spring, such as he used to make in the old "Gym" at West Point, where he was a practiced athlete, he launched himself into mid-air and landed fair and square on the back of the astonished horse, who reared and plunged as Jack grasped him by the mane, and the reins were dragged from the trooper's hand. The attack was so sudden, so artfully planned and well executed, that Jack was a dozen yards away before the Confederate could snatch his revolver from his belt and fire. Jack's hand went involuntarily to the holster. Yes, thank God! there was a revolver left by the "Johnny Reb" who had bestrode his new mount so proudly that morning. Another dash, a swerve to avoid the trees when he reached in safety the road beyond the gate, and then Jack drew a long, free breath as he realized that, so far, he had made his escape.

Chapter XI

At Peyton Hall

After the second mile Jack drew his rein and proceeded more cautiously. He remembered that Mosby had made passing reference to some of his squadron who were lagging behind, and it would be evil fortune, indeed, if he should chance to fall foul of them. His wisest plan, perhaps, would be to strike off in a northwesterly direction, hoping to reach Opequan Creek where he could cross it and get through to Winchester, avoiding the small towns that lay in his way, which either Federal or Confederate might be occupying, as events ruled. But first, he must reach the Peyton plantation as Champe had bidden him. Her directions were, no doubt, the result of her knowledge re-

garding the Confederate movements, and it would be folly to disregard them even if he wished, — which he did not, — and his blood quickened and thrilled as he thought how soon he should look into her eyes again.

The ravine, through which he was directed to go to reach the plantation, intersected the main road, and Jack was racking his brain to remember the exact point where he could find it, when his horse began to prick up its ears and give indication of alarm. Jack listened eagerly; very faintly he thought he could distinguish the sound of hoof-beats on the road ahead. In a second he threw himself off the saddle and, leading his horse, plunged into the pine woods on the left. Then, holding the animal firmly by the nose to prevent its whinnying, he cocked his revolver and waited.

Presently there loomed in sight two

riders. They were walking their mounts and talking in tones which were distinct enough to reach the listener. One of the men wore civilian's dress; the other, under a long cavalry cloak, evidently was in uniform, for Jack could hear the click of his sabre against the stirrup as they came to a halt nearly opposite him.

"I must see Mosby to-night," said the latter in the soft Southern intonation, which Jack instantly recognized as belonging to his whilom captive, General Lafonte. "But I do not think I shall accompany him back to Richmond. There is work for me here, and I gladly take advantage of your offer to return to the plantation and lie *perdu* for a few days until I get my orders from General Lee. How long do you remain in this vicinity?"

"I leave for Baltimore to-night," said the other, and Jack, leaning forward

cautiously, saw that the speaker was Peyton Randolph. "I was on my way to the plantation when we met, and must leave you now, general, to go there. The road seems safe to-night, but when you come again, take the ravine, which is a short cut, and you will strike it by a bridle path a few rods to your right."

Jack shrank still farther into the shadows as Peyton raised his whip and pointed straight in his direction; then with a courteous good-night to his companion he wheeled his horse and trotted up the road, where Jack lost sight of him as he disappeared beyond the pines.

It was close upon midnight when Champe Randolph, raising the shade, looked out of her window across the lawn with somewhat anxious eyes. Three times had she repeated the action, at intervals of half an hour, and

now she was almost sure she saw a figure move cautiously from one tree to another. She lowered the shade and darted out into the hall.

"Aunt Judith," she called softly, "be ready to open the door quickly. I think some one is coming across the lawn."

As she spoke she ran swiftly down the stairs, and was just in time to see a tall figure slip across the threshold while Aunt Judith hurriedly closed and bolted the door behind him. But it was not her brother who clasped her hand in both of his, but a man wearing the hated Federal blue, who gazed down into her face with eyes that thrilled her very soul with their passionate feeling, and whose breathless voice said, —

"I have come to thank you with all my heart and soul for your angelic goodness to me before I am once again a prisoner. There is some one hard on

my track. I had only time to slip off my saddle, throw it into the bushes, and set my horse free to gallop away, hoping he would be pursued by the rider who was following me, while I ran into the ravine and gained your door. Hide this; I may be searched again," — and he thrust the cigarette case into her hand.

Without a word, but with indescribable swiftness, Champe seized Jack by the wrist and dragged him inside the parlor. The light from the hall shone dimly against the heavy oak wainscoting, which was black with age and set in square panels around the room. Stooping down, her deft fingers pushed one of the carved leaves that ran like a wreath around its base; the panel moved noiselessly out and disclosed a dark aperture, — the secret chamber of Peyton Hall.

"You are safe till I release you,"

she whispered. "It may be daybreak before I come, but I will not fail you."

Her hand rested for a brief second in his, and then the panel swung back into its place as silently as before.

Aunt Judith, snuffing the candle in the hall, felt Champe's hand press her shoulder.

"Remember, Judith," said her mistress firmly, "not one word to Mr. Peyton; you understand?"

"Laws, yes, honey; you done tole me twice a'ready. Whar fo' yo' tink Judith gwine to play spy after all dis yer miration? Dar's Marse Peyton now, chile; doan yo' hyar his whistle?"

Champe darted to the front door and threw it open. Her brother stood at the foot of the steps holding his horse, and she ran down to greet him.

"Call one of the boys to take my horse. I must be off before four o'clock," he said. "Lafonte told me

you were here, or I should not have stopped as I am pressed for time, but I have news for you, Champe. Come inside." Then, to a gray-haired negro who came hobbling up from the almost deserted servants' quarters, where he had been fast asleep, his master said quickly: "Have you seen any straggler about the place, Pomp? Perhaps I'd better come down to the barn with you. I chased an apparently riderless horse that I heard dashing about the pine woods near our gate, but could get no trace of his rider, nor any sign of other horsemen who may have pursued him."

"No, Marse Peyton, I done see nobody 't all. Miss Champe tole me ter keep watch, an' I 'se been sittin' an' sittin' in de winder wot oberlooks de house an' de barn, an' not even a jack-rabbit hab run 'cross."

"Not many rabbits left to run," said

Peyton good-naturedly, as he followed Champe inside.

She went down the hall, but he called her back, taking the candle from the table as he did so.

"There is a fire in the dining-room," she said, as he walked to the parlor door. "I 'm afraid that one is out. Aunt Judith, bring a fresh log here, please, and get ready some refreshments for Mr. Peyton before he goes."

Peyton set the candle down on the parlor mantel, and, turning, surveyed her with such gravity that Champe cried out, —

"What is it? You look as if you were the bearer of bad news."

"So I am; Estes Carey" —

"Not found guilty by court-martial?"

"No, dear," he said gently. "He is dead" —

Champe gave a sharp cry.

"Dead! Oh, Peyton, do you mean

that I am too late, — that he was shot?"

"No; though I fear that would have been the verdict. He was found dead in the room where he was confined at Orange Court House. It was an embolism of the heart."

Champe gave a gasp, and stumbled blindly into the nearest chair.

"I shall never forgive myself," she moaned. "*Why* did I let him stay that evening!"

"What do you mean?" asked her brother sternly. "Had you anything to do with those belated dispatches? My God, Champe, I trust you were not mixed up in that affair. This comes of my permitting you to" —

"Stop!" she cried passionately. "I am my own mistress, and accountable to no one for my actions."

"Were you engaged to Estes Carey?"

"That is a question I shall not an-

swer. But I do know that he was kept for more than an hour at the house where we stopped after crossing Hazel River, because the horse which should have been in readiness for him was in the field and could not be caught, and he spent that time with me. I know the exact hour at which he left, and it was to give this testimony that I was hurrying south."

There was a pause; Champe endeavored to regain her composure. She suddenly remembered that every word they spoke could be heard by the occupant of the closet behind the panel.

"You can at least save his memory from reproach," said Peyton. "It was the discrepancy in the time which made the worst feature of the charges against him. Poor Estes; I loved him well." Then, seeing his sister's eyes fill with tears, he added in a lighter tone, "General Lee has determined" —

"Wait a moment," she said, interrupting him hastily, fearing that valuable information might reach ears for which it was certainly not intended. "I am freezing here, Peyton; come into the dining-room. I am sure you must be starving, and we can talk there while you are eating supper."

Jack's vigil would assuredly have proved a long one to him in the cramped quarters where he was concealed, but for the fact that it was provided with a mattress and several pillows, whereon he ensconced himself comfortably after Champe and her brother had left the room, and fell asleep. He woke with a start as a light flashed in his eyes, and instinctively he grasped his revolver as he sprang to his feet. But it was Judith's kindly black face that met his gaze, not the fair smiling one of which he had been dreaming.

"Come along, Marse Captain," said she softly. "I 'se got some corn pone an' aigs in der oder room fo' yo', an' Pomp 's on de hunt fo' yo' saddle whar Miss Champe said yo' hid it in de ravine."

"Thank you, aunty; but who will supply the horse? I sent mine flying through the woods last night, and no doubt my pursuers caught him."

"'Deed dey did n't, sah. Dat hoss ob yourn 's got mighty good hoss sense. I doan know whar yo' *sent* him, but Pomp done *foun'* him 'bout an hour ago standin' whinnyin' outside de barn, talkin' to li'le Missy's mare. De sense ob dat hoss — ef he 'd come dar jus' ten minutes befo' he 'd hev struck Marse Peyton goin' out. Spec dat hoss am a good Yank, too, sah."

Jack echoed Judith's chuckle, but kept his eyes on the door of the dining-room, praying that Champe would ap-

pear for one farewell word before he rode away. There was a faint light of dawn in the sky as he came into the hall, and in the semi-darkness he saw her at the foot of the stairs.

"I must hurry you away," she said. "At any moment one of our officers might appear, and I should be powerless to help you."

"You have done — everything," he said, looking at the fair face where the trace of tears was visible, and seeing added beauty in the touch of sadness they had brought.

"And now you know the secret of Peyton Hall," she added more lightly. "There is a concealed stair in the wall which leads from the room above to this below. It opens with a spring of the same sort; that explains how General Lafonte was able to elude you so cleverly. Captain Phillipse," — she hesitated, and a brilliant blush dyed her

face, — "I trust when you cross this threshold that you will forget all that I would wish forgotten" —

Again his eyes seemed to read her soul as her voice faltered. He took her hand.

"I will remember nothing but that you are the bravest and most generous of women. There are other words I would like to add" —

She drew her hand away.

"No, no," she cried, "not — *now!*"

Another moment and Jack was in the saddle, but as he spurred his horse from the door, the memory of her voice, as it trembled on the last word, carried comfort to his otherwise aching heart.

Chapter XII

Face to Face

The mansion at the corner of Mt. Vernon Square was brilliantly lighted. Mrs. Vansittart was giving a dinner, evidently a large one, judging by the carriages that rolled up to her door. The guests were chiefly young people, with the exception of Mrs. Pegram and Colonel Denbigh, for the dinner was considered as an announcement of Cecile's engagement to Fitz Tilghman; news of which had come rather suddenly to social Baltimore, accustomed though it was to war-time love affairs and marriages. But just before the hour for the guests to assemble an apparently unfortunate contretemps occurred. Mrs. Vansittart was about to descend the

staircase when Stéphanie came running down the hall.

"If Madame pleases, here is a note which the bearer says is most important. I told him Madame was occupied, but he insists that he will wait for a reply."

Mrs. Vansittart broke the seal and ran her eyes over the penciled lines it contained.

The man whose arrest you directed will be at Dalkeith before midnight. At what hour shall I proceed?

BENNETT.

For a moment Evelyn's hand trembled; then she turned back to her boudoir, where Stéphanie followed her, and, seating herself at her desk, wrote rapidly in reply, —

"*At twelve o'clock. Await my coming.*"

She sealed the envelope.

"Give this to the bearer. Order my coupé to be at the door in fifteen minutes; then return to my room."

Mrs. Pegram had arrived early and was with Cecile, watching the girl, who, with radiant face, was drawing on her gloves, when Mrs. Vansittart came hastily into the room.

"Cecile, my darling, I am so very, very sorry to have anything happen to alter our plans for to-night, but poor Tante Thérèse is suddenly taken ill and in great danger. She has sent for me, and I must go to her at once. Mrs. Pegram will, I know, do me the great kindness to preside in my place at dinner, and stay with you until I return. I have ordered the blue bedroom arranged for you," to Mrs. Pegram, "as I may be detained late."

"Oh, mamma, how very unfortunate! Can you not wait until after dinner? Fitz and I will be so, *so* disappointed;"

and Cecile looked ready to burst into tears.

"Of course I will take your place at the dinner-table," said Mrs. Pegram, "but I think I must go home to-night, as I brought my carriage in town, and it will wait for me. But, with Cecile, I wish you might be here for at least part of the dinner."

"I must explain that Tante Thérèse is my foster-mother," said Mrs. Vansittart. "Indeed, she deserves all the care I can give her for her devotion to me in my youth. Try and get on without me, dear; I will hasten back as soon as I am able to leave her."

Half an hour later the Vansittart carriage drew up at the little house on Linden Avenue. Petit Jean opened the door.

"You need not return for me," said Mrs. Vansittart to her coachman. "I will get a carriage and drive home when

I am ready," and she entered the house as the servant drove away.

Tante Thérèse, standing in the front room, was confronted by Evelyn, who, with pale face and gleaming eyes, laid her hand on her arm, whispering, —

"Success at last ! He has fallen into the trap, and is at Dalkeith House, where I am going to meet him. Send Petit Jean for a carriage, — be sure he gets a good swift horse, no matter what the carriage is like, — and I wish him to drive. Let him lose no time."

Tante Thérèse disappeared by the kitchen door, and Evelyn paced the floor until her return.

"Do I go also, my heart ?" asked the Creole.

"No. For years I have waited and prayed for this hour, — the hour of my revenge; now I will meet him face to face, alone. There is a fire in my veins that seems to consume me."

She loosened her fur cloak as she spoke, and Thérèse saw that she was in evening dress.

"Mon enfant!" she exclaimed in dismay; "such exposure in this weather — and the drive is long."

"I had no time to change my dress. I was giving a dinner for Cecile. It has happened well, Tante Thérèse. I have been expecting the news for days, but it came only half an hour ago, and most fortunately his sister is at my house, where she will stop till I return. Fortune favored me so far. I was obliged to make the excuse that you were desperately ill in order to leave them. Remain here and watch till Petit Jean comes back."

"Let me go!" implored Thérèse. "I fear for thee, — and — yes, — I fear him as I feared him years ago."

Evelyn's cold smile was not good to see. She had partially regained her usual

composure, but Tante Thérèse knew too well the volcano that smouldered beneath her calm exterior, and, as she said, she feared. There was a sound of wheels rattling over the cobblestones, and she raised a corner of the window-shade to look out into the street.

"It is Petit Jean with the carriage; but wait. There will be no foot-robe to keep out the cold. Take my long black cloak, it will serve."

She took the cloak off the nail where it hung, and accompanied Evelyn down the steps, tucking it carefully around her as she sat in the carriage, while her mistress gave Petit Jean the necessary directions.

"Dieu vous garde!" whispered the old woman, kissing the hand she held. "Remember he once beguiled thee. Trust him no more, not even if he should plead for mercy."

She stood watching the carriage till

it turned the corner, then, going inside, she locked the door securely and sat down to wait. And as she waited, her thoughts were busy with the past,— that past which had made a desperate woman of Evelyn Vansittart.

From the banks of the James River, where he was one of the largest plantation owners, Evelyn's father had gone, when a young man, to pay a visit in New Orleans, and from there brought home a bride, the petted daughter of a Spanish Creole. The marriage had not been a happy one; he was a handsome, easy-going fellow, too weak to rule his high-spirited wife, too indolent to resist the temptation to deceive her rather than incur the bursts of passionate temper to which she was addicted. He was always much beloved of women, and his wife, no doubt, had cause for the insane jealousy, which included even his comely slaves. Indeed, Evelyn's

birth had been hastened by one of her jealous outbursts which he endeavored to soothe by sending the innocent cause of it away from the plantation. They never had another child. Evelyn owed most of the care which environed her to Thérèse, the Creole, who had accompanied her mother to the James River plantation, and whose devotion to the child she nursed became idolatry. Tante Thérèse, as she was called in the pretty foreign fashion, was seldom separated from her charge, and when Evelyn, a girl of sixteen, was sent to a finishing school in New Orleans, Thérèse accompanied her. There, at the home of one of the young American girls, a schoolmate, where more freedom was allowed than would have been possible among the Creoles, she met Gaspard Lafonte. On the liaison which followed it is unnecessary to dwell, but it was to Thérèse that Eve-

lyn went in her despair. Gaspard, loving her to distraction, finally awoke to her peril, and endeavored to make every reparation in his power. In haste and secrecy they perfected their plans for marriage, and Evelyn left New Orleans, under pretense of a recall to her home, to meet him. But from that day until now neither word nor line from him had ever reached her. It was owing to a singular chain of circumstances, which accounted to her family for her absence, that she had been able to preserve her secret unsuspected, unknown to any save her faithful foster-mother. How clearly Thérèse remembered the agony and despair of it all, as she sat there waiting, — grim and relentless as Fate itself !

The wind whistled shrilly through the oaks and pines around Dalkeith House, and a few big flakes of snow seemed the forerunner of a storm. A figure,

wearing a tightly buttoned coat which reached nearly to his heels, came cautiously up the carriage road which wound around the lawn to the front door. When nearly there, the man paused, hesitated, and then drew more closely into the shade of the box hedge, totally unaware that another figure, shorter and more powerfully built, had crept along on the other side of it, and kept pace with him. The stranger evidently knew the place well, for he made the circuit of the house twice before going to a small side door at the end of a covered passage which ran down to the stable. Then he gave a long, low whistle, and rapped twice on the panel. There was a moment's pause, then the stable door swung open, and some one came up the passage from the other end.

"Who dat?" demanded the voice of old Cicero, as he hobbled along the

brick walk. "Dere ain't nobody home. De Lawd save us an' bless us! — how cum yo' hyar, Marse Gaspard?"

"My sister — how is she, Cicero?"

"Miss Augusta, sah? Sholy she 's all right. She 's gwine in to Baltimo' dis ebenin', an' Jim drove 'caise I 'se been havin' a misery pow'ful bad lately. But doan stan' hyar, Marse; cum right inter de house. It mought be dangerous ef anybody wuz 'round, tho' I ain't seen nobody hyar lookin' or searchin' fur some days, sah."

Following the negro, General Lafonte entered the library, and Cicero lit the lamps, first drawing the shades down carefully. The room was empty, but the blazing wood fire gave out generous warmth, and he sat down beside it, grateful for the rest and comfort it suggested, while Cicero went out to forage for supper. Returning with a tray plentifully filled, and a bottle of

wine, the old servant waited upon him respectfully, talking as he did so.

"Shall I order a bed made ready for you, sah? De servants is all gone to bed 'cept Miss Augusta's maid, an' she's soun' asleep in de kitchen; jes' left her dar."

"I think not, Cicero." Lafonte looked up a trifle wearily. "From what you say, my sister is perfectly well. The message which I received spoke of her serious illness; and although I can imagine no reason for treachery, coming as it did through the usual source, perhaps it is best for me to depart as I came."

"Sholy yo' won't go widout seein' Miss Augusta, sah? She 'd feel terribly upset to miss yo'."

"I would be safer in the city, Cicero. You recollect what a narrow escape I had the last time I came up."

"Well, den, Marse, ef yo'se sot upon

goin' I 'll saddle a hoss fur yo'. Yo'se nearly daid beat, an' ef yo' mus' go, trus' to de hoss's legs radder than yo' own. Sit right hyar by de fire, an' 't won't take dis niggar long to saddle up, an' I 'll cum an' let yo' outer de back do' myself."

Cicero hustled off, resolving to attend to this matter without calling one of the "boys" to assist him as he usually did, but as the faithful old soul ambled down the brick walk to the stable a strong arm seized him from behind, a gag was thrust into his mouth before he could utter a shout for help, and he was dragged as quickly as his struggles would permit into the stable, where he was laid on the floor and securely bound.

After waiting some twenty minutes for the negro's return, Gaspard Lafonte thought he heard the sound of wheels crunching the ground on the side of the house. He glanced at his watch;

it might be his sister returning from Baltimore, or it might be dangerous intruders. He sprang swiftly to his feet as the door opened and closed behind a woman's graceful form. As his eyes fell upon her he staggered and caught the table to save himself from falling, and a gasping cry escaped him, —

"Eve! Eve! Oh, my God!"

She stood before him in all her wonderful beauty; the costly furs dropped from her shoulders, which gleamed white and shapely as they rose above her low-cut gown. Her face was pale as death; her eyes sombre, yet full of fire.

"Gaspard Lafonte, what have you to say to me, — the woman whom you betrayed and deserted in her hour of utmost need?"

"Eve, my darling!"

He tried to take her in his arms. She raised her white hand and struck

him in the face, a mere touch, but it stung him to the heart. He groaned aloud as he released her.

"You thought that?" he asked.

She made no reply; with a look of utter scorn she waited for his answer to her accusation.

For a moment there was silence as the man strove for self-control. Twice he tried to speak, but only an inarticulate murmur reached her ears. He turned from her, walked swiftly across the room, and then, recovering himself, faced her with eyes as stern and unyielding as her own.

"How dare you condemn me unheard?" he said. "I, who have spent years of sorrow in which I searched vainly for you, exhausting every clue; I, whose soul was so passionately bound to yours that no other love could enter there; I, who would have mourned you as dead rather than deem you unfaithful.

Could you not give me the benefit of the doubt?"

"No!" The pitiless word was her sole answer.

"Eve, you must — you shall hear me."

She inclined her head with the haughty grace for which she was famed, and sank into a chair. Not by the quiver of an eyelid would she show him how the old fascination was beginning to exert itself; Thérèse had been wise to warn her. He remained standing, leaning one hand upon the table as he faced her, his words coming slowly and distinctly at first, then quickening into passionate appeal.

"When I left you with Thérèse to go home and arrange my affairs, it was with the understanding that we were to meet in Mobile, as I was not known in that city, and be married. As I told you, by a clause in my father's will I

could inherit nothing if I married before I was twenty-five, and I then lacked two years of that age. Therefore I went to Baton Rouge to collect a small legacy which had been left me by an aunt, for I needed the money to use for you in your coming trial. I sold my securities and started down the Mississippi to hasten to your side. That night, as our boat was indulging in the almost inevitable race with a rival steamer, she caught fire, a frightful accident followed, and many of the passengers lost their lives. I was fortunate in securing a rail to which I lashed myself, but as the steamer sank a falling timber struck me. I was picked up the following morning at Bonnet Quarre, where I had floated, unconscious from a fracture of the skull. I fortunately fell into the hands of a skillful doctor who trepanned me, but for days after the operation, my life was despaired of, and

when at last I was able to be carried to New Orleans, it was only to be placed in a hospital. When I left there, though hardly able to travel, I went at once to Mobile, to find that both you and Thérèse had disappeared, leaving no address behind. I searched the city; I went nearly mad with anxiety, for I dared not write to you at your home, or seek you there. When I ventured, six months after, to visit Richmond I learned that your father had died, and you, with your mother, had gone abroad to remain indefinitely. Then the bitter knowledge forced itself upon me that, without a word, you had cast me off, and that our secret must be kept at no matter what cost to me. This is my story — my reply to your accusation. What is your answer to me?"

Although every word and tone carried conviction with it, Evelyn steeled herself afresh against him, as she broke

forth with the fire and passion of her girlhood, —

"Your suffering is as a feather-weight in the scale of mine! What can you, a man, know of the shame, the degradation that I, a mere girl, endured for years? And yet I broke a good man's heart when I told him that I had loved only once!"

Lafonte made a hasty step toward her, but she waved him back, and went on more calmly, —

"Thérèse and I went, as you directed, to Mobile, and there, for two awful weeks, I waited for your coming. I was becoming less able to travel, but we dared not stay, as the woman in whose house we were grew suspicious, and plied us with questions we could not answer. Finally Thérèse decided that it would be better to return to Virginia; she knew of a quiet spot in the mountains where her brother had

been employed as a miner. The company had failed, and the mine had been abandoned, but he still remained there. To that refuge she proposed to take me, and accordingly we set out. The memory of that journey is a confused one; it seemed to me as if it would never end. A constant fever consumed me, and the thought of your desertion was driving me mad. One day we reached the handful of houses called a village that lay at the foot of the mountain. Thérèse and I took breakfast, such as it was, in a little cabin inhabited by these mountaineers, who, in their simple way, made us welcome. She insisted that I should remain there while she went around the base of the mountain where she thought to find her brother's cabin. I dreaded to have her go, and for two days I stopped there alone. The third day a sort of frenzy seized me, and I decided I would try to find

Thérèse. I procured a rough, two-seated wagon and induced the owner to drive me up the mountain. A thunder-storm came up suddenly; the horses, young and badly broken, became terrified and bolted, throwing out the driver. I caught the reins and tried to guide them, but only for a few rods, when I was thrown violently to the ground. I knew nothing more until I woke to consciousness days after in a little cabin where a kindly slave woman had cared for me through an illness that was nigh unto death!"

"Oh, my darling," the man cried impulsively, "how you must have suffered!"

"What was the bodily pain to the anguish of my soul," — she answered bitterly, — "the soul that has never ceased to feel its shame. Enough of that. When I recovered I found Thérèse, nearly distracted by my absence, at the

foot of the mountain, and together we went back to the plantation on the James River. The night that I arrived my father died. His death at that time changed all my life — Hush, what was that sound?"

"Only the silver clock on the mantel striking the quarter," said Lafonte. "It is almost midnight."

Evelyn sprang to her feet. She had forgotten that she had betrayed this man. The hour for which she had longed with such revengeful passion was almost at hand. Could she, now, do this thing?" He saw her great eyes soften and glow as they were raised to his; he opened his arms and she fell blindly into his embrace as she cried, —

"Gaspard, my love, my love! I must save you before the clock strikes twelve!"

Chapter XIII

At the Stroke of Twelve

"WHAT do you mean?" asked Lafonte in amazement.

"You have been followed. This house is watched, and you are in danger of arrest the moment you attempt to leave it."

"How did you obtain your information?"

"From the person who gave the order," she said calmly, her indomitable courage coming to her aid as she met the penetrating glance of his eyes. "There is no time for explanation; we have not a moment to lose. How did you gain admittance to the house?"

"With Cicero's help. I signaled to him, and we came in by the north side door to which I have a pass-key."

"Thank heaven! Give it to me."

"But, Eve, dearest," —

She had vanished through the doorway before he had time to complete the sentence. In a brief minute she returned carrying Thérèse's long black cloak, which she flung around him.

"Come with me, and step softly," she whispered, clasping his hand in hers. "You must go out the way I came in, — through the conservatory, which is not lighted. Outside the door stands my carriage. Jump inside it and crouch down on the floor, covering your head and shoulders with the cloak I gave you."

They had made their way swiftly through the darkness, and Evelyn opened the outer door of the conservatory, past which ran the carriage road. Petit Jean sat on his box, stamping his feet to keep them warm. She turned the knob of the carriage door so gently

that the man did not even look around, and Lafonte buried himself inside as she gave the order to the servant.

"Drive slowly around to the front door and await me there," she said.

With breathless haste she stole back to the room she had just left and glanced at the clock. It was seven minutes to twelve.

Taking Lafonte's gloves, which lay on the table, she ran into the hall and dropped them at the foot of the stairs. Then she went to the side door and locked it carefully, placing the key in the bosom of her gown. Drawing her furs around her, she walked to the front door and stepped outside, being careful to close it behind her. There stood the carriage, and as she entered it a figure which she recognized dashed around the corner of the house. With a steady hand she let down the window and leaned out, facing the new-comer.

"You have just three minutes," she said, as Bennett bared his head respectfully. "I would try the side door by which he entered, first. But be careful to get away with your prisoner before Mrs. Pegram returns, which she may do at any moment. How many men did you bring?"

"Three, madam; two are with me; one stationed at the gate below."

"And the word?" she questioned.

"Massachusetts!"

"Thanks; good-night."

The carriage rolled swiftly along to the gates of Dalkeith. Petit Jean paused for an instant as Evelyn gave the countersign, and then her low laugh of triumph was smothered on Lafonte's breast as he rose and clasped her to his heart.

Out on Linden Avenue the old Creole kept her watch faithfully. Twelve o'clock, then one, sounded from the clock of a church-tower near by, but it

had almost time to strike again before Tante Thérèse heard horses' feet click on the cobblestones at her door. She crept softly to open it; to her infinite surprise two figures came hastily up the narrow steps and into the house instead of the one she had expected.

"Mon Dieu!" she gasped, as Evelyn threw her arm around her neck and whispered, —

"Tante Thérèse, it is he, Gaspard; do you hear? And all is explained. You must hide him in the room above till I come to-morrow, and then we will get him away in safety. Do you understand, Tante Thérèse?" and she stamped her foot imperiously at the bewildered and enraged old woman.

"I hear," she muttered. "What did I say, mon cœur? M'sieu le General has the persuasive tongue; oh, yes, he has used it often before."

"Thérèse, how dare you? Do not

mind her, Gaspard; she is old, but"— suddenly changing her tone — "she is faithful."

"Always, to thee, mon cœur," came the humble answer; but Evelyn did not see the baleful glance shot at Lafonte under the bushy eyebrows as the woman lit a candle in silence and prepared to take her visitor upstairs.

"I will come to-morrow as early as I can. Guard him as you would your life, Thérèse," said Evelyn, and in a moment more she left the room and the house.

General Lafonte followed the Creole up the narrow stairs, and was ushered into a small but exquisitely neat room where stood a bed, a table, and several chairs. Thérèse walked over to the windows and drew the shades, closing the blinds also. Then she set the candle on the table and addressed him.

"It is some years since we met, M'sieu le General," she said. "When I

saw you last you were making plans to have a marriage ceremony performed. You have satisfied Mam'selle, grâce de Dieu, but you have still to answer to me for your base desertion of the child I reared and love so well."

She spoke in rapid French, with an air of dignity which struck Lafonte, and appealed to him as no furious outbreak would have done. Therefore he answered her with courtesy and patience. As Evelyn had said, she was old but faithful.

"Sit down, Thérèse," he replied, handing her a chair, and seating himself as he spoke.

"Merci, M'sieu; I prefer to stand."

But he insisted, and in as few words as possible repeated the story of his accident on the Mississippi River, the detention in the hospital in New Orleans, and his search for Evelyn afterward. Thérèse listened with an out-

ward air of much respect. Inwardly, she was laying her plans.

"Could M'sieu but have seen Mam'selle that night on the mountain,—hélas! It was moonlight, and I, distracted that I was by her disappearance, had gone to the door of the cabin where my brother had made shelter for us,—I thought I heard a sound of feet in the still, still night. Oh, those horrible silent woods, and the mountain high above! I can see them now. The moon showed the shadows more plainly, and it seemed to me that one of them was moving. Behold, it came nearer, and it was Mam'selle, in her long black gown, so tall, so white, so like a spirit that I thought it was her ghost until she sprang into my arms sobbing as if her heart would break. M'sieu should have seen his work that night as I saw it."

"Good God, woman, have I not told you that I did all in my power"—

"But yes, M'sieu; — men, the best of them, know not how women suffer. Mam'selle did not recover from the shock of her accident and the birth of the child for months" —

"A child, Thérèse! Was there a child born to me?" he cried, absolutely stunned by this revelation.

The woman looked at him through her half-closed eyelids; she knew now where to strike.

"I should not have spoken, — pardon, M'sieu. If she, Mam'selle, did not tell M'sieu, it is not my place to give information."

Lafonte sprang from his chair in uncontrollable agitation. A child, — Evelyn's child and his, — the thought was supreme happiness. Was his lonely life to be consoled at last, his starving heart fed?

"Answer me," he said sternly. "Was it born dead? Why do you seek to tor-

ture me by withholding what I have a right to know?"

"It was born alive, M'sieu. It was a girl. More than this I do not know. M'sieu must ask Mam'selle. I have, without intention, spoken when I should have been silent. I ask pardon. If Mam'selle wished M'sieu to know, she would no doubt have told him."

She had planted her sting neatly; she saw him color hotly, and heard the half-uttered oath below his breath. She rose and curtsied respectfully.

"I hope M'sieu will sleep well. He need have no fear of arrest; Thérèse always obeys Mam'selle. Good-night, M'sieu."

Chapter XIV

The Mills of the Gods

THE morning had dawned clear, bright, and frosty, before Gaspard Lafonte closed his eyes. At last the heavy sleep of fatigue came to him, and Thérèse knocked twice at his door before he replied to her. She brought him the usual French breakfast of rolls and coffee, and with it a note from Evelyn, which he tore open as soon as the Creole left the room. In it she said she could not come to the house before afternoon, but she implored him to stay in hiding until she had perfected her plans for his escape from the city.

"I am coming to you, my own," she wrote, "the moment I am released from entertaining some guests. How I hate them you may imagine, — as I hate any-

thing that keeps me from your dear embrace, — so longed for all these horrible, maddening years. Keep saying over and over 'she is coming,' and before you know it I will be with you."

But, notwithstanding her promise, it was late when the Vansittart carriage appeared at Thérèse's door. Petit Jean admitted her, and she went at once upstairs, only pausing long enough to tell the Creole that all was going well, and to bid Petit Jean to admit no one; her carriage would wait.

Never, even in the days of her girlhood, had Evelyn been so beautiful as at that moment, and Lafonte fell, as of old, under the spell of her marvelous fascination. It was with a start that he finally recollected what Thérèse had told him, and there was a joyous ring in his voice as he said, —

"And so, Eve darling, there was a child, — a little girl. Tell me where she

is that I may clasp both my treasures to my heart."

She had been smiling up in his face, and at first did not catch his meaning. Then, to his infinite surprise, he saw her look change. A sort of frozen horror crept into her eyes; she turned pale even to her lips as she gasped, —

"A child, Gaspard? I do not understand what you mean?"

"Our child," he said tenderly. "Can you not imagine what that means to me? Thérèse told me" —

"Thérèse!" She tore her hands from his, and stood coldly defiant before him. "Indeed! And, pray, what did she say to you?"

His look of utter astonishment stung her, but she waited for his answer.

"Surely you cannot misunderstand me? She said that we had a living child, a girl. Where is she?"

"I do not know."

It was the same pitiless tone which he had heard the night before. His face grew stern as he listened, but he controlled himself admirably.

"Eve, look me in the face and tell me the truth."

She raised her eyes with her usual superb courage. She had not lied to a dying man, — why do so now?

"You wish the truth, — well, you shall hear it. There *was* a child, born of your sin and mine. Do you think I would ever look in its face again? I left it there in the mountains, and I pray God that it is dead."

"Eve!" he gasped. "Are you human? Even the wild creatures of the fields and jungles love their young. Do you not love yours?"

Where had she heard words like these before? Who had said that, she wondered dully?

"I have but one child," she said, —

and each word fell clear and cold as ice on the man's tortured heart, — "Cecile Vansittart. Ask me no more."

He looked at her in silence. Pale with concentrated passion, he seized her hands.

"Is that your last word? Then hear mine. If our child lives, I command you to find her. Until you do we are strangers."

With a gesture of utmost scorn, Evelyn turned from him and walked toward the door. A despairing cry burst from him: —

"Eve, Eve, for God's sake, consider what you are doing."

For one brief second her step faltered, — she half turned toward him. Then she bowed her head, and without a word left the room. Listening, he heard the clatter of her horses' feet as she was driven rapidly away.

Lafonte, exhausted from the terrible

disclosures of the past twenty-four hours, threw himself on the bed and tried to think out clearly what his next move could be. He knew that he must return to his command as quickly as possible, and that when night fell he could escape from the city. Evelyn had assured him that all was safe, but now he chafed under the necessity of accepting her assistance. He had his own means of evading the authorities, and he resolved to use them as soon as darkness enabled him to venture into the streets of Baltimore. So thinking he fell asleep.

The street lamps were burning dimly, and night had fallen when he woke. Some one was rapping on his door, and, seizing his revolver from beneath his pillow, he unlocked and opened it.

"Is M'sieu ready?" asked Thérèse. "Petit Jean says all is arranged. Will it please M'sieu to descend?"

He followed her down the stairs where

the man stood waiting; then he turned back and pressed a paper into Thérèse's hand.

"Give that to Mam'selle," he said. "It contains an address that will always reach me. Adieu." And beckoning Petit Jean to follow, he passed out into the night.

Thérèse stood in the doorway, looking eagerly up the street. At the corner she could see two dark figures just beyond the lamp.

"Not in my house," she muttered; "I will keep my oath — so far. But perhaps we will not need this address which M'sieu has intrusted to me."

Lafonte and his companion had reached the corner, and were about to turn it, when the two men whom Thérèse was watching closed in upon him. There was an instant's struggle, a shot, then another, and Bennett, springing out from his concealment to the

assistance of his comrades, laid his hand on Lafonte's shoulder.

"Do not compel me to cripple you, general," he said, picking up the revolver, which had fallen in the scuffle. "Here are my orders."

Lafonte glanced at the paper extended to him. By the light of the lamp he read: —

War Department, Washington, D. C.

Arrest General Gaspard Lafonte, and send him to Fort McHenry, thence to Fort Lafayette. By order,

Edwin M. Stanton,
Secretary of War.

Petit Jean had been struggling violently with one of the men, not recognizing Bennett, who wore his uniform, and he took advantage of the pause to slip off as fast as his legs could carry him. Having no idea of Thérèse's treachery, the honest fellow thought

that the best thing to do was to notify Madame, in whose wonderful power he had the firmest faith, and he set off to carry the information of General Lafonte's capture, going by the most circuitous route lest he should be tracked. In this way much time was lost, but when he finally reached Mt. Vernon Square, he perceived at once that something unusual was taking place. There were lights flying to and fro in the upper chambers of the Vansittart house, and before the door stood a doctor's gig. Petit Jean stole back into the alley and sought the stable. No one was there; he could hear the murmur of voices in the kitchen, and he crept cautiously to the door, thinking to find Stéphanie. From where he stood he could hear her voice, relating some story between her sobs. Then he distinguished Scip's tones.

"De good Lawd knows I done tole

Peter nebber to let dose young hosses go outer de stable do' widout de heavy curb bits," he groaned. "But Peter was on de box wid de madam all de evenin', an' dat fool André took li'le Missy's message to come quick wid de coupé 'caise she mus' go an' meet Marse Tilghman at de Calvert Street station, an' so Jacques jes' hitched up, an' was 'round to de front do' befo' I could get in my livery cote, an' dat 's how dey all got off widout me."

"Yes," sobbed Stéphanie, as Petit Jean, forgetful of all, pushed his way inside, and joined the group of frightened servants. "Jacques says that at the corner of Saratoga and Liberty streets a boy, unrolling a parcel, let the white paper fly out of his hand, and the wind carried it directly into the face of one of the horses. He shied, then both of them bolted down that steep hill to the corner of — what you

call — oh, Lexington Street, where was coming a heavy coal cart. The coupé struck the cart, and was overturned with Mam'selle inside, and" — Here Stéphanie's voice failed her.

Petit Jean leaned forward.

"Just one little mark on her pretty temple," sobbed the girl. "The doctor says she was dead when Jacques lifted her up. Ciel! do you hear that?"

Through the house rang a shriek of mortal agony. Petit Jean crossed himself devoutly, and fell upon his knees rocking to and fro, as Evelyn Vansittart's voice sounded down the hall with a heartbreak in every tone, —

"Oh, God, my child, my child!"

Chapter XV

The Rankest Rebel

It was spring in the land, — that spring of 1865 which told the end of the great Civil War. Richmond, the beleaguered city of the South, bleeding in every pore, but fighting gallantly to the last, had surrendered; and from both North and South there went up to heaven a sigh of relief that the long tension of years was ended. The Monumental City was rent in twain between joy for her boys in blue and grief for those who had worn the gray. Among the women who did not hesitate to express their feelings was Miss Susan Lindsay.

Sitting in her parlor one morning with two of her intimate friends, she was holding forth to most interested listeners. For Miss Sue had had her

experience of what it was to be at issue with the government, and it was by no means to her liking.

"You heard, my dear," she said, addressing Mrs. Pegram, "that I was swooped down upon and whisked off to Fortress Monroe before I had time to say Jack Robinson or put on a clean collar. And I never knew until yesterday who supplied the information that sent me there. Never mind his name," — with an indignant sniff, — "I shall get even with him sooner or later, — poor, miserable white trash that he is, — he can wait. You know, Augusta, that I, as well as a good many other women here in town, at the beginning of the war had the Confederate flag painted on the inside cover of my watch. I presume you have yours on at this minute, have n't you?" pausing in her speech to gaze regretfully at the emblem which Mrs. Pegram displayed with pride. "I

was standing that morning at the window, having just finished my breakfast, when I saw Cousin James Henry come limping up the steps, and I went out to the door to save his coming further, as I strongly suspected he had a message for me from Champe, who was off again on one of her scampers to Richmond. He pushed me inside in a hurry, and said: 'Susan, I can't stay a minute, for I've been trying to distance the provost marshal. Some one has lodged information against you, and they will be sure to search the house; so get anything that relates to the Cause out of sight as fast as you can;' and off he scuttled down those steps, and I rushed upstairs, racking my brains to remember what on earth I had that was contraband of war.

"Martha, my maid, — one of pa's slaves, who 's taken care of me for twenty years, — was running down-

stairs with a package of letters, which, harmless as they were, — only filled with family details, — had come across the lines. I told her to stick them in the kitchen fire, as I did not want the smell of burning paper in my bedroom. All of a sudden I remembered my watch and that telltale flag. Where on earth could I hide it from those hateful, prying Yankees? I could n't throw it away, and there was no time to bury it in the yard, as we did the silver on the plantation, and, as I was expecting to hear the doorbell ring every minute, *what* do you suppose I did?"

She paused dramatically, with upraised hand.

"What?" gasped Mrs. Pegram and Mrs. Lovell in the same breath.

"I sat down deliberately and *licked it off!*"

Gravity was impossible with Miss Sue's dancing eyes in evidence, and

both women shrieked with laughter, in which she joined.

"I wonder it did n't poison you," said Mrs. Pegram as soon as she could speak.

"Well, I did have my doubts, so I was busy scrubbing my tongue when the provost-marshal appeared. Did n't I have fun with him, though! I gave him my opinion on a good many subjects before he got me into a carriage and carried me down to the boat."

"I don't doubt it," said Mrs. Lovell. "I only wish I could have heard you."

"You see," continued Miss Sue, "there 's a heap of difference between these volunteer Yankee soldiers and the regulars, — especially those officers who belonged to the old army. Pa lived and died under the Stars and Stripes, — simply because the Stars and Bars had n't been born in his lifetime, — and I can just tell you that when I reached Old

Point and happened to strike some of the men who 'd gone back on their States and hung on to Uncle Sam's coat-tails, they were mighty kind and polite to me. There never was such a fool thing as dragging me off and arresting me, anyhow. They could n't prove a thing against me as long as I had attended to the watch, which might have been evidence of my proclivities, and they had to send me back after I 'd put in three weeks in a casemate at the Fort. But there was one Yankee youngster who really made an impression on me. *He* was a gentleman."

"What did he do for you?" asked Mrs. Pegram.

"It was at City Point this happened, one chilly March day. I was on board the boat, which was to transport a lot of other unfortunates like myself to Fort Monroe, where a wise and beneficent war secretary was sending us. I had

on an old bombazine gown, which I p'intedly adhered to during my captivity, and I had tied a white worsted nubia over my Fanchon bonnet to keep my ears warm — which that ridiculous bonnet did n't accomplish. Altogether I expect I did look like an antiquated frump, not at all a female to attract a young man by my personal beauty. As I sat there, all huddled up, on the deck, a vender came along the dock with a tray full of just the nicest looking real old Virginia plum-cake. For the moment it made me downright homesick, and, without thinking where I was, I said aloud, 'Oh, how I do want a slice of that plum-cake; I have n't seen any such for years!' I was too far away to call the man, but I watched him selling it to a party of men on the dock: presently I forgot all about it. Just as the boat was to start, a tall, mighty handsome fellow in Yankee uniform, with

the yellow stripes of the cavalry, approached me. You need n't look horrified, Augusta; I do know a good-looking man when I see one, even if he has the misfortune to wear detestable colors. He marched up, took off his cap, laid a white paper parcel in my lap, and without a word dashed back over the gang-plank. When I opened the parcel, there was a generous supply of the plum-cake I 'd been wishing for."

"I hope you threw it overboard," said Mrs. Lovell indignantly. "It was in miserable taste, — so bold and pushing on his part."

"That was just it," returned Miss Sue, with a queer sparkle in her eye which Mrs. Pegram appreciated. "If he had n't been bold I should probably have thrown it at *him*, instead of which I ate it down to the last crumb, and was sorry I could n't thank him for his kindness to an unknown cake-hungry

frump. Have you heard from your brother lately, Augusta?"

"The last letter was from Fort Lafayette," answered Mrs. Pegram. "He is well, though very tired of the confinement. We hope to have him at liberty ere long. Where is Champe, Sue? I thought she would be coming up soon."

"I should be awfully worried about Champe except that Peyton is with her. They were at Danville by last accounts, and are working up that way, I think. You know she left Richmond on the last train that came through. I only wish I *did* know where she is to-day."

"Don't worry, Sue. Champe has the faculty of falling on her feet. Good-by, and be sure you come out to Dalkeith on Wednesday."

It is rather a blessed thing that one's wishes are not always gratified, as, in this particular instance, Miss Sue's de-

sire to know Champe's whereabouts would have brought her dire dismay. For that daring young woman, at the very moment when her beloved relative was sighing for knowledge, happened to be seated on a wood-pile, where, with her head pillowed on a nice clean pine knot, she was fast asleep.

The wood-pile was located near a station on the Richmond and Danville Railroad, and the fact that a fire was raging not far from her was a mere trifle in Champe's estimation compared with her obtaining a nap. From which it may be inferred that she was, as usual, taking the chances with a reckless disregard of consequences which was eminently characteristic.

Leaving Richmond with her brother, she had gone to Danville, where they stayed until after Lee's surrender at Appomattox. And now they were making their way North to the nearest out-

post of the Union army in order to return to Baltimore. Many had been Champe's adventures on the way, and the cause of their present detention was the burning of a railroad bridge at Clover Station, which compelled them to cross the river on a bateau. Fortunately, on the northern side Peyton had discovered a hand-car, which had been seized by two darkies for their own use, who, however, being amenable to reason backed by two silver dollars, were induced to accompany them and push the car. Champe's small trunk was mounted on it to be used as a seat, but as the novel cavalcade was about to start on its travels, one of the wheels proved insecure, and Peyton, with the assistance of the negroes, was repairing it. Hence the nap on the friendly wood-pile.

"Wake up, Champe," said Peyton with a hearty laugh, helping her to de-

scend from her perch. "Your prancing steed is ready, and I think we can manage to make the next station, where, perhaps, the trains are running again."

Champe mounted into the hand-car and sat on the trunk, and they continued their journey, keeping up a most amusing interchange of banter over their varied adventures. Five miles were made in this fashion, and then, as they began to feel decidedly hungry, arose the question of foraging for dinner.

"I cum frum de oder side ob de ribber, Marse," said one of the darkies, "but Jim done tole me dis mawnin' dat dere's a white folks house 'roun' hyar whar he cum frum."

"How far away?" asked Peyton.

"Not fur, Marse," spoke up Jim; "roun' de next curve — see!"

Peyton looked in the direction pointed out, and could distinguish the chim-

ney of a house between the trees, so the men trudged cheerfully along, and in due time they came to a standstill nearly opposite the welcome habitation. Leaving Peyton to guard the car, lest the men should take advantage of their absence and abscond with the trunk, Champe climbed down and walked briskly across the fields, from which the fences had disappeared, and nearing the house she beheld a woman, wearing a pink sunbonnet, standing on the porch. Champe waved her handkerchief, and received an answering friendly signal. Peyton, watching them from his post of observation on the car, saw the two rush into each other's arms as Champe's face was buried in the pink sunbonnet.

"Champe Randolph! Well, I never was so glad to see anybody in the whole course of my life," gasped its owner.

"Murray Leigh, where *did* you

come from?" was the answering query. "And, what's more to the purpose, what are you doing here?"

"Waiting for a chance to get escort to Baltimore. I knew some of our people would be sure to take this road north, and I came here straight from Richmond because the owners of this place are some of our kinsfolk. Is that your brother out there in that hand-car? Well, of all the droll conveyances! But I don't care; I'm going with you if I have to walk behind and help push it."

"We won't require you to do that," laughed Champe. "At the present moment I'm out for forage. Can you help us?"

"We are just about to take our noonday meal of corn pone and buttermilk," said Murray with mock ceremony, "and cordially invite Mr. and Miss Randolph to come and assist us to make

way with it. Oh, Champe, the very last chicken we had was carried off by a perfectly horrid weasel last night, and I nearly wept when I found its tail-feathers reposing down under that cherry-tree," and she pointed with tragic finger to the scene of the theft.

"Be thankful it was n't a perfectly horrid Yankee who confiscated it; the bare idea of delicious buttermilk makes me thirsty. Have you anybody whom I can send to watch that car while Peyton joins us?"

"Not a soul; our last boy, Jim, marched off yesterday. He has periodical disappearances, however, and may turn up again."

"I presume that 's the very darky up on the track with our car. We picked him up at the river."

"Then I want him," said Murray, preparing to rush off and capture the runaway. "Have him bring up your

trunk, and we can manage a room for you. Peyton can have the lounge in the parlor, and you can stop here over night, and we 'll plan some way to go off together to-morrow."

It was a merry party that sat down to eat corn pone and drink buttermilk, notwithstanding their precarious situation and lack of many necessities. Murray's cousins were eager to have news of any sort, and they made their new acquaintances heartily welcome. On inquiry, Peyton found that a neighbor of the Leighs might be able to provide him with a more comfortable conveyance than the hand-car, and that the nearest Union outpost was Meherrin Station, the camp of the Sixth Corps.

After a good night's rest and breakfast Champe came flying down next morning to find a most unique establishment in front of the door. It consisted of a Tennessee wagon to which

were harnessed a horse and a mule abreast, and a second horse leading tandem. Mr. Williams, the friendly neighbor, had provided as escort his overseer and a negro driver, who rode the horse. Inside the wagon stood two rocking-chairs, which Champe declared were a stroke of genius, and an improvement on the hand-car. Peyton and the overseer perched themselves on the trunk, Champe and Murray took possession of the chairs; and with many grateful thanks the little party pursued their journey.

Late that afternoon, Jack Phillipse, whose regiment belonged to the famous Sixth Corps, rode over to headquarters with a message from his colonel to General Meade. On his way back, as he was passing the quarters of the Sixth Vermont Regiment, he saw a queer-looking vehicle, in front of which rode an old darky wearing a much-patched

red coat, and carrying a white handkerchief on a long stick. The sentry, who was laughing heartily, brought his gun to salute, and endeavored to recover his gravity as the officer drew up alongside. Jack looked at the conglomerate quadrupeds, and the ancient retainer who bestrode one of them, but with instinctive courtesy to the inmates of the wagon, whom he took to be Southern refugees, he said gravely, —

"Can I be of service?"

As his eyes caught sight of the rocking-chairs he bit his lip to conceal a smile; but the next instant the waiting sentry saw his officer snatch off his gauntlet, and, cap in hand, bend from his saddle to take a small hand extended to him.

"Good-evening, Captain Phillipse," said Champe politely.

"By Jove!" quoth Peyton Randolph to himself, as he sprang from the wagon.

"That's devilish quick of Champe. She must have taken a good look at him that night at Conrad's Ferry. Thank heaven, he won't recognize her."

Jack, whose bronzed face had turned scarlet with surprise and delight, recovered himself as he met a warning glance from the hazel eyes, but he was still too bewildered to do more than repeat his offer of service as he shook hands with Peyton, who asked to be taken to General Meade's headquarters, as they wished to surrender in due form.

"Certainly, I will go with you, Mr. Randolph; but if the ladies will drive to the building used as our hospital, they can be better accommodated there than in the tents which we usually furnish. The mess of my regiment is there also, and I hope you will all join us at supper."

Peyton thanked him, and Jack rode with the little party to the hospital,

where he left them with the surgeon in charge, and then sought General Meade.

Champe and Murray found themselves very comfortably placed in a big room, rather lacking in furniture, but provided with two beds, and scrupulously clean. But the movement around the hospital, the changing of the guard, the soft sound of distant bugles in the little world of camp life, made Champe feel sad and lonely, and when Peyton, who evidently did not approve, came to consult her as to their going to supper in the mess-room, she laughed at his scruples and went cheerfully downstairs, glad to be diverted from the softened mood which, for some reason, she feared.

Fortunately for Peyton's peace of mind, Murray devoted herself to him, and it was left to Champe to meet the officers, including the colonel, which

she did with an easy grace and apparent oblivion of their hated Yankee uniforms, which made Jack admire her more than ever, for he knew how few Southern women would have made such a sacrifice even to good manners. And somehow a faint ray of hope was thereby vouchsafed him, and he registered an inward vow that he would dare fate on the first opportunity. That opportunity came sooner than he had hoped for.

After supper the colonel proposed that for the amusement of their guests a double quartette of the enlisted men of his regiment should be sent for, and for nearly an hour they listened to the songs the war had called forth. Finally the colonel glanced at his watch, and rose. Some good angel — or perhaps the little god, Dan Cupid — may have whispered in his ear, for, to Jack's surprise and infinite gratitude, he said, addressing Peyton, —

"If you will walk over to my tent with me, Mr. Randolph, the papers which you require will be ready for signature."

"Let me find my hat, colonel, and I'll join you at the door," said Peyton, vanishing, and the courtly old officer turned to Champe, —

"There is one pretty sight you should be made acquainted with that we can offer you. Phillipse, when it is time for 'taps' take Miss Randolph to the veranda on the south side, and let her see the whole camp answer the call. Good-night."

Champe's color rose. Two officers with whom she had been talking stood either side of her, and had heard the colonel's innocent little trap sprung. If she refused to go, they would consider it a snub for Jack, and she had n't a shadow of an excuse ready, not even a cold. Murray was talking to one of

the singers, and had not heard. Jack's pleading eyes met hers for an instant. Better have it over at once, — she always did hate Yankees!

"If you come now," said Jack eagerly, past caring whether he gave himself away to his brother officers, "we shall be just in time."

Out on the veranda the scene was a novel one. Below, and stretching away in the distance, lay hundreds of white tents with twinkling lights. There was the hum and stir of a multitude in the air, softened and subdued by distance; above, the stars, and around them the soft atmosphere of a Southern spring. Champe felt the sadness and the longing again steal upon her with overwhelming power, and as Jack spoke her name she startled him and herself by bursting into tears.

"Champe, Champe," he caught both her hands, "what is it?"

"It 's — nothing," sobbed Champe desperately. "You made me come, and I 'll never forgive you, — never!"

"Never is a long time," said Jack with cheerful assurance, gathering her up in his arms, "and I am going to spend part of it in telling you that I love you with all my heart."

"I 've known that for some time," answered a disdainful voice somewhere in the region of his coat-sleeve, "but what I don't know is whether I hate you quite enough — for a Yankee."

"I am perfectly willing to be hated," retorted triumphant Jack, kissing the pretty little ear which alone was visible. "Anything more you wish to be assured of before you deign to look at me?"

"Yes," in a small voice that quavered suspiciously; "promise that you 'll never tell Peyton that I locked you up in the secret chamber at the plantation."

"Never!"

"And — Jack," he smiled as he recognized the mischievous inflexion, "you must always let me have the Stars and Bars flying in my room."

"You may have a whole stand of them in the front hall," promised Jack recklessly, "but they'll have to float side by side with the Stars and Stripes, my darling."

Out on the night, far in the distance sounded the bugles. "Put — out — the — lights." Champe raised her head and kissed him on the lips.

"Jack," with a little sigh of deep content as she laid her head on his shoulder, "I don't know what you think about this, — and you probably won't believe me, — I call it an 'unconditional surrender.'"

Chapter XVI

The Javelin Strikes

THE anteroom leading to the office of the Secretary of War was full to overflowing. Since the surrender of Lee and the collapse of the Confederacy there had been an increase in the crowds that came to the War Department, and the patience of the "Iron Secretary" was taxed to the utmost. But on this spring morning the attention of many of the visitors was drawn to one of their number, a very beautiful and regal-looking woman dressed in deep mourning, and accompanied by an old French servant who watched her with the deepest solicitude. To the surprise of the waiting crowd, the strange lady, after a brief fifteen minutes, was approached by a bowing official, and, greatly to the envy

of those who had spent days of fruitless effort to obtain an interview, she was at once passed through the sacred portal, leaving her attendant in the anteroom.

As Evelyn Vansittart entered the Secretary rose and came forward to meet her with great cordiality.

"My dear madam," he said, conducting her to a seat, "why did you not send me word you were in town? I would have come to your hotel, and need not have given you the annoyance of waiting in the crowd who daily torment me."

"I came," answered Evelyn, "because I have a personal favor to ask, and it seemed to me more appropriate that I should seek you than you me."

"There is no favor, Mrs. Vansittart, that you could ask which would be in any way a fit return for the very great service you have rendered the government. It was only made known to me

recently, that to your clever and well-planned organization I owe much valuable information obtained from rebel sources, and you must permit me to express my genuine admiration for your work, and to extend my individual thanks for your patriotism and generosity."

Evelyn surveyed him a moment in silence.

"Do not credit me with too much patriotism," she replied; "it was more the excitement of the game. Where the pawns on the boards are human lives, Mr. Secretary, the hazard of the moves is its fascination."

He fixed a penetrating glance upon her. This was a woman after his own heart.

"And the favor, dear madam, which you came to ask?"

Evelyn hesitated for a second, and the man, watching her behind those

eye-glasses which served admirably to conceal his thoughts, smiled, and said,—

"It is granted."

She turned pale, as if under great stress of emotion.

"I will not tax your time and patience. I wish to take a short trip into the mountains of Virginia, and as I am told it is a most unsafe thing to do in the present unsettled state of the country, I came to request that you give me an escort, — a military one, if necessary. Is it too much to ask?"

The Secretary leaned back in his chair, but though evidently surprised he said,—

"No; it can be arranged. When do you wish to go?"

"As soon as possible. On the result of my mission depends the life and health of one very dear to me. I have suffered much, — I can endure no more."

"You have my deepest sympathy," he began, then waited, as he saw the agony that filled her beautiful eyes.

She put out her hand as if to ward off a blow.

"I thank you; but I cannot, even yet, discuss it. There are griefs we must bear alone. Of such is mine."

She paused to regain the composure she had momentarily lost. Then she handed him a slip of paper.

"I have written the locality, so far as I know it, and this is the memorandum. May I ask how soon my escort can be ready?"

"In two days," replied the Secretary, glancing at the paper. "Are you staying at Willard's?"

"Yes."

"I will call on you there to-morrow, and if there be anything further that lies in my power to arrange for you, command me."

He took Evelyn's hand in farewell, and she knew that once again a man — and a great one — had yielded to her charm and fascination. But as she left the room the astute Secretary said to himself, —

"That woman has a secret which no one will ever share."

When Evelyn returned to her hotel she went directly to her room, and, sitting at her desk, wrote a letter which she addressed to Fort Lafayette.

"Gaspard," she wrote, "circumstances and you have conquered me. Out of the depths where my soul has been plunged, I stretch out my hands to you. I am going into the mountains to find the child — our child, Gaspard. If she be alive I will bring her to you; then will you take me to your arms again? My desolate soul cries out to you. Come to me, then, my love. Why should any lesser tie separate you and me?"

She sealed the envelope, and then a thought crossed her mind; she smiled with a touch of her old imperious triumph, saying half aloud, —

"The Secretary shall forward it for me. Even the censor will not meddle with an envelope that bears his frank."

With the magic of orders signed by the all-powerful War Secretary, and her own unlimited money, Evelyn did not find her journey to the mountains as difficult as she had expected. She left Tante Thérèse in Washington to await her return, and on the third day from starting reached the little village she remembered so well. As she came near the scene of her former terrible experience she found herself unwillingly going over each detail of it. Once more she saw Aunt Polly's kindly face bending over the old cradle; again she heard her voice saying, —

"In the long years to come dose

baby fingers will draw, and draw, and pull your heartstrings."

Ay, the slave-woman's prophecy was coming to pass. Could it be possible that the child she had forsaken and scorned would unite the heartstrings that had snapped asunder when Cecile lay dead in her youth and beauty before her.

It was a sunny May morning when Evelyn started to go up the mountain. She left her escort in the village with the exception of the corporal, whom she took with her in the wagon she had procured. No one seemed to know anything about Aunt Polly. She made many inquiries among the cabins at the base of the mountain, but the denizens thereof only shook their heads; they remembered no such person. There were some people who lived way up on Silver Mountain, one of the men said, but no one answering to her de-

scription of Aunt Polly and Uncle Cy. Thérèse's brother was dead, and his family had moved away; that clue was lost. Evelyn's heart began to fail her. Was it possible that she really cared to find the child?

Evelyn's own recollection of the situation of Aunt Polly's cabin was vague. Beyond that wild flight down the mountain side at night she had nothing to guide her memory. So, when they came to a cabin about halfway up, Evelyn bade the driver stop, and, climbing out of the wagon, went to its door. A rather tidy looking woman opened it; she was evidently a mountaineer, but she proved more intelligent than the others. Yes, surely she did remember Uncle Cy and his wife, for her sister, Sabria, had nursed her when she died, two years ago. And Uncle Cy, why, he got killed by a falling tree afore that.

Evelyn's heart sank. Where, then, was the child? She dared not ask.

"Can you tell me where the old cabin is?" she said, after a moment's thought. "I think I would like to see it."

"Why, sho'ly, lady; it's jus' round the bend of the road thar. My sister,— as I wuz sayin',—she that tuk care o' Aunt Polly,—she 's livin' in that cabin now. She 's a lone widder woman, Sabria, an' Aunt Polly's darter lives thar with her—jus' them two critters."

"Aunt Polly's daughter!" exclaimed Evelyn, her heart beginning to throb. "She never had any children that I knew of."

"Laws, yes; that's what we 'uns call her. But Aunt Polly wa'n't her real mother. She allus said Mary was adopted."

Evelyn put out her hand and steadied herself against the door-post. Over her heart rushed a warm pulsation. It

had lain frozen in her breast so long that the new sensation frightened her. But her self-control returned, and after thanking the woman she walked back to the wagon.

"I find that the cabin I am looking for is just around the bend of the road," she said to the corporal. "I will walk there. Wait here till I return."

The cabin was not more than a quarter of a mile distant, and Evelyn saw it as soon as she reached the turn spoken of. The trees had grown, and the cabin looked larger. Yes, there had been another room added; and as she drew nearer she saw that there were some flowers growing in the little garden. She walked up the path and knocked gently at the door. There was no answer, and after waiting a little time she rapped once more. Then she noticed that the door was ajar, and she stepped quietly inside the cabin.

The room was empty. How familiar it looked, even after all these years. There stood the old lounge against the wall, and beyond it the rocking-chair where Aunt Polly used to sit with the baby on her lap. She wondered if the little room she slept in had the old cradle in it still, and as the thought crossed her mind, she glanced at the door which led into it.

Some one was inside, for a low crooning noise came through the partly open door. Evelyn walked across the cabin, and, pushing the door open, paused on its threshold. On the floor sat a girlish figure, rocking herself to and fro, playing with a string of threaded scarlet berries. In her hands, long and shapely, her small head, her curved throat, her masses of dark hair, she saw repeated her very self. Evelyn uttered a low cry, and as the girl raised her head, she stepped eagerly forward. There, be-

neath her gaze was the same oval face, the clear olive skin; but the great soft eyes which met hers, — what were they?

In them no light of reason had ever dawned, no soul was ever born; and the low crooning sound that issued from the soft red lips was only meaningless babble.

"Ef yo' desert yo' own little baby the Lawd will sutainly punish yo' where it hurts most."

Was that the handwriting on the wall?

With unspeakable horror, Evelyn Vansittart stood for a moment transfixed. Where the tragedy of her life had begun, it ended.

The Riverside Press
Electrotyped and printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.
Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.

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